

One writer has said: "To look at the world and its physical and spiritual life through the eyes of a man of God like James is a breathtaking opportunity...To hear and read what James has to say about the Christian faith is an open door into the light of heaven."

The heart and soul of the book of James is found in the words of 1:22, "*But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only.*" James wants the believer to turn his or her profession into practice. What we believe is to be fleshed out in our behavior. As believers we are to have more than a knowledge of God's word. We are to learn how to apply the word to our every day life and allow the word to enable us to be all that we should be as believers and equip us to meet the everyday demands of life.

Let's begin our look at the book of James by getting acquainted with the author. In the opening verse of James we are told who the author is and from his greeting we learn some things about him. He introduces himself as, "*James, a servant of God.*" What an interesting way for James to introduce himself. The word "servant" literally speaks of a "slave." The word is descriptive of a slave who has completed his term of service and could have been set free, but instead chose to remain a slave. It is a word that speaks of someone who is a slave by choice.

In the Old Testament you have the picture of a slave who loved his master so much that he chose to remain his slave. His ear lobe was placed against a doorpost and then pierced. He would from that point on bear the mark that he was a slave, a slave by choice, and a slave to the master he loved. James was declaring his love for the Lord Jesus Christ and that he was His willing servant or slave. James was declaring that his life was not his own but belonged to another—the Lord Jesus Christ.

First, we see:

1. JAMES THE HONORED SERVANT!

First and foremost, when we study the book of James, we must remember that it is more than the "Book of James." It is a "Book of the Bible." It may commonly be called "The Epistle of James," "The Letter of James," or "The Book of James," but first and foremost it must be recognized as God's Word.

Therefore, we are reminded of:

A. The Divine Inspiration Of The Book.

Paul said in 2 Tim. 3:16, "*All scripture is given by inspiration of God...*" The word "inspiration" means "breathed in" meaning that the Bible is "Divinely or God breathed." In simple words, the book of James, as well as all other books of the

Bible, came from God.

The Bible is the Word of God! Every book, every chapter, every verse, and every word is God breathed. It came from God. When we read and study the book of James, as well as any other book in the Bible, we must do so with the realization that we are reading and studying God's Word.

Secondly, we are reminded of:

B. The Human Instrument Of The Book.

The Bible is a divine book, but there is also a human side to it as well. Peter explained the origin of the Bible this way: *"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost"* (2 Peter 1:21). Peter tells us that the Bible is not the result of the *"will of man."* That is, the Bible is not a collection of man's thoughts and words. It is more than the writings of man. Peter tells that, *"holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."* Peter tells us that what was spoken or written was under the influence of the Holy Spirit. In other words, they spake or wrote what God told them to write.

Each book of the Bible has a human author but those human authors were merely instruments of God by which He gave us His word. God gave them the thoughts they put to paper. Every word was written by the direction and under the guidance of God. When we speak of the "Book of James" we are merely saying that James was the human instrument whereby God gave us this section and portion of His word.

Secondly, let's think of:

2. JAMES THE HUMBLE SERVANT!

You also notice in verse 1 that James speaks of himself, not only as a servant of God, but also, *"of the Lord Jesus Christ."* You might expect every New Testament writer to say such a thing, but in the case of James it was a revealing statement of his deep humility. Let me explain.

First, notice:

A. His Relationship With Jesus.

The name "James" was a very common and popular name in New Testament times, a form of the great Old Testament name Jacob. There are several in the New Testament that bore the name James. There was James, the son of Zebedee and the brother of John. There was James, the son of Alphaeus, and James, the father of Judas the disciple (not Judas Iscariot). James, the author of the book before us, may have had a popular name, but there was a matter that set him apart from all the others in the Bible named James.

Notice Mark 6:3, *"Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James..."* Mary and Joseph had several children after the Lord Jesus was born and one of them was named James, who happens to be the author of the book we

are considering. James was the half-brother of the Jesus. Paul wrote in Galatians 1:19, *“But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord’s brother.”*

Understanding James and his relationship to Jesus, it makes his statement that he was the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ all that more interesting. James could have introduced himself in many ways. He could have introduced himself as, “James, the leader of the church at Jerusalem.” Acts 21:8 speaks of him in that role. He could have introduced himself as, “James, the pillar of the church.” Paul called him a pillar in Galatians 2:9. He could have introduced himself as, “James, an apostle.” That’s what Paul called him in Galatians 1:19. Or he could have introduced himself as, “James, the Lord’s brother.”

Now, you talk about something that would have been impressive and gave weight to what he had to say, reminding his readers and audience that he was the Lord’s brother would have. I can imagine that if he were living today, he could have run ads in the paper announcing, “The brother of the Lord Jesus Christ will give his testimony, ‘What It Was Like to Grow Up With Jesus’” and people would have packed out auditoriums to hear him tell about fishing and playing with Jesus and their childhood days. But instead, he does not even mention that he was the half-brother of Jesus but declares that he is the servant of Jesus. It is a very revealing mark of his deep humility.

If we were the half-brothers of Jesus we would most likely flaunt it and use it to our advantage. Yet the Bible declares that we are joint – heirs with Him; this should lead us to expressions of jubilation and sharing with any and all.

Paul said it best in Romans 12:3, *“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.”*

Secondly, think of:

B. His Reverence For Jesus.

James not only had a low consideration of himself but he also had a lofty conception of Jesus. Instead of bragging that he was the half brother of Jesus, he speaks of what Jesus means to him. Notice carefully that James describes Him as *“the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Even though James was the half-brother of Jesus he saw Jesus as **THE SOVEREIGN ONE**. He viewed him as “Lord.” He was more than a brother to James; he was his Lord.

He also saw Jesus as **THE SAVING ONE**. He also viewed him “Jesus.” Jesus means Saviour. James saw more than a brother in Jesus. He saw the Saviour of the world who had come to die for the sins of the world.

He also saw Jesus as **THE SPECIAL ONE**. He saw him as “Christ,” which means, “the anointed one.” James knew that Jesus was not just a man. He knew that He was more than a member of his family. He was the long awaited Messiah, the

anointed one, the Christ!

The secret to humility is seeing who you are and seeing whom Jesus is. The more we see Him and who He is the more we will realize how unworthy and undeserving we are to call Him our Lord and Saviour.

3. JAMES THE HELPFUL SERVANT!

The final statement in verse 1 indicates to whom James was writing. The recipients of James' letter were, "*the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.*"

First, notice:

A. How James Described Them.

James described them as "*scattered abroad.*" The Greek word is *diaspora* from which we get our English words *dispersed* and *dispersion*. We read in Acts 8 that after Stephen was killed outside the gate of Jerusalem, the Christians were scattered throughout the Roman world. They had to flee for their lives.

James is writing to Christians that had been forced to leave their homes, jobs, and property. These believers were living under the pressure of persecution and the threat of martyrdom.

Secondly, notice:

B. How James Directed Them.

As one writer said, "The people who would read his letter were literally hanging by a thread." What does he say to them? James says, "*Greetings.*" The word means, "rejoice." To a people that were scattered, struggling, and suffering, James seeks to encourage them. He wants to help them face what they are going through.

In his letter to them he tells them how to deal with the stress and pressure of the trials they are going through. He seeks to give reason and rhyme to all that is happening to them and to help them to apply God's truths to every thing that was happening in their life.

James is a person with a lowly consideration of himself, a lofty conception of His Saviour, and a loving concern for the saints. He does not think of himself, but he does think of others. He cares about those who are hurting and seeks to be a help and strength to them.

James is seeking to help believers flesh out the truths of the Word of God. One of the ways we put into shoe leather what we know is by caring for others and seeking to help others. Being a Christian is more than living in our own private little worlds. It is seeing those around us and in some way helping others.? James was that kind of servant.

Charles L. Allen wrote.....

*If any little love of mine may make a life the brighter,
If any little love of mine may make the heart lighter;
God help me speak the little word and take my bit of singing,
And drop it in some lonely vale to set the echoes ringing.
If any little love of mine may make a life the sweeter;
If any little care of mine may make a friends life a fleeter;
If any little lift may ease the burden of another,
God give me love and care and strength to help my toiling brother.*

May we all learn from James the honored, humble, helpful servant of God.

I think of the story of a fellow that rode into a western town on a stagecoach. He was hired as the local saloon's bartender. The owner gave him a word of warning: "Remember, if you ever hear that Big John is on his way to town, drop everything and run for your life." Things went fine for several months until one day, a big strong cowhand with a ghost-white face burst through the swinging doors shouting, "Big John's a comin', Big John's a comin'." The patrons scrambled to get out of the door, knocking the bartender to the floor, running over him as they rushed out doors and windows. The bartender gathered his senses, got up off the floor, and was dusting himself off when a giant of a man suddenly came through the saloon doors. Riding bareback on a buffalo, using a rattlesnake for a whip, he rode through the doors, splintering the doors and doorframe. The man flung the snake into the corner, knocked over the tables as he walked up to the bar, and then with his huge fist split the bar in half. "Give me drink," he yelled. "Y-y-y-yes sir," said the frightened bartender. The man bit the top of the bottle off with his teeth, downed the contents in one gulp, and let out a belch that shattered the saloon mirror, and then turned to leave. The bartender said, "W-w-w-would you like to have another d-d-drink?" The man roared as he jumped back on his buffalo, "I ain't got time. Big John's a comin' to town."

There may be some of you that feel like Big John's come to town. You have found that troubles and trials have bullied their way into your life and you are surrounded with adversity and affliction. In the opening verses of James, he speaks to us about our trials. He helps us to turn our tears into telescopes. He helps us to look at the things that are presently happening in our life from a future perspective.

James used the word "temptations" in verse 2. When we use the word temptation we often use it to speak of a solicitation to do wrong. James is not talking about seduction and temptation but of suffering and trials. If you remember from our first study (1:1), James is writing to a "scattered" people, not a sheltered people. He is writing to people who are experiencing trials in their lives.

In my opinion, verses 2-4 are some of the most enlightening and encouraging words in the Bible for those that are experiencing trials in their life. The passage before us teaches us that trials should not be viewed as a foe, but as a friend.

Let's notice verses 2-4 and learn how to turn our tears into telescopes.

First, we see:

1. THE PREDICTED OUTBREAK OF TRIALS!

One of the things James tells us is that trials are certain and should be expected in our life. He tells us that we can mark it down that somewhere and at sometime there will be an outbreak of trials in our life. Notice carefully what James says in verse

two: *“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;”* Notice that James says *“when ye fall into divers temptations,”* not *“if ye fall into divers temptations.”* The question is not “if” we have trials, but “when” we have trials. James is telling us trials are certain and that we can expect trials to come at one time or another.

I think of what Peter said in 1 Peter 4:12, *“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:”* Peter tells us to not think it strange or be surprised when trials come our way.

I also think of what Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:11, *“Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me.”* Paul said that the Lord delivered him “out of” trials, not “from” trials. The Lord delivers out of our trials but He does not deliver from trials. Trials are to be expected. James says trials will come. The question is how will those trials may come.

First, we see that:

A. Trials Can Come Suddenly.

Notice the phrase, *“when ye fall.”* The word “fall” is only used one other place in the New Testament and that is in Luke 10:30 where we read, *“And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.”*

The word’s “fell” and “fall” are the same word. It’s usage in the story of the Good Samaritan gives us an illustration of what James is talking about. There was a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho and suddenly and without warning robbers attacked him. James is telling us that we can “fall” into trials that come suddenly and without warning. We can be going our merry way without a care in the world, then all of sudden we find ourselves engulfed in trials. A knock at the door, a phone call, a visit to the doctor, a pink slip on Friday can suddenly turn our calm and peaceful sea into a stormy and raging sea. Our storms can come suddenly. Everything may be fine at the present, but just around the bend a trial or trials are facing us.

We get our English word “pirate” from the word translated “temptation.” Like pirates that ambush the unsuspecting ship, trials can come suddenly.

We also see that:

B. Trials Can Come Separately.

James speaks of our falling into *“divers temptations.”* The word “divers” is an interesting word. We would call it a Technicolor word. It literally means, “multi-colored.” In the Old Testament, the same word was used to describe Joseph’s many-colored coat. James uses the word to describe the diversity of our trials and of how trials can come in separate ways.

One may experience one kind of trial and someone else another kind. It is possible that we can experience different kind of trials at the same time. Like a multi-colored garment, there are various kind of trials. There are trials that are financial, physical, and even spiritual.

There are the trials of correction and there are the trials of perfection. The trials of correction come when we are out of the will of God. God uses these trials to bring us back to Himself. The trials of perfection come when we are in the will of God. God uses these trials to make us more like Christ.

Again, James tells us the question is not “if” trials come, but “when.” Trials may come suddenly and separately, but they are certain to come.

Secondly, we see:

2. THE PROMISED OUTCOME OF TRIALS!

James tells us that when trials come they always have a divine purpose. He says in verse 3, *“Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.”* The word *“knowing”* speaks of “understanding.” James is saying, “I want you to understand that when trials come they are not without rhyme or reason. God always has a purpose in the trials that come our way.” James explains three things that trials produce in our life.

First,

A. Trials Produce Spiritual Purity.

James speaks of the *“trying of your faith”* in verse 3. The word “trying” speaks of the purging effect of trials. The picture behind the word is that of precious metals being heated in order for the impurities to be removed.

God puts the believer into the fire in order to purge our lives of all the impurities. Trials are often God’s way to getting us to deal with things in our life that are displeasing to the Lord. Trials have a purifying effect.

Someone has said that God puts us on our back that we might look up. God has his ways of getting our attention and He has his ways to working on things in our life. Trials are often the way He accomplishes this work.

We also see that,

B. Trials Produce Spiritual Stability.

James also tells us in verse 3 that our trials *“worketh patience.”* The word “patience” speaks of perseverance. James is telling us that one of the ways God makes strong Christians is through trials.

Ephesians 6:10 says, *“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”* How are we made strong? As someone has said, “Trials are the divine gymnasium whereby we develop our spiritual muscles.”

Thirdly,

C. Trials Produce Spiritual Maturity.

In verse 4 James says, *“But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”* James used the word “perfect” twice in the verse. It is a word that means, “complete, or full grown.” James is talking about spiritual maturity. He does not want the believer to be lacking, but complete and living a full Christian life.

Airplanes take off by overcoming the resistance of gravity and wind. Yet once they become airborne, that wind lifts them higher. Trials have a way of lifting us higher and higher. Trials are part of God’s way of helping us mature spiritually.

God always has a purpose in our trials. It may be to produce spiritual purity, stability and maturity, but He always has a purpose.

Lastly, we see,

3. THE PROPER OUTLOOK FOR TRIALS!

James not only tells us that trials can be expected and that they always have a purpose, but he also tells us how to look at our trials. He explains what our attitude should be concerning these trials.

Notice first,

A. Our Joyful Anticipation.

Notice again in verse 1 a strange statement that James makes. He tells us to *“count it all joy”* when we are facing trials. We consider it to be hard or almost impossible to have joy when we are going through a trial. Trials are not pleasant and they certainly are not enjoyable.

Most would say it is a joy when we escape trials, not a joy when we encounter trials. But notice carefully what James is saying. The word “count” is a word that means, “to think ahead or look forward.” James is telling us that our joy comes from looking ahead. Looking ahead at the end result of our trials.

Samuel Rutherford, said "Whenever I find myself in the cellar of affliction, I always look round me for the wine." When we find ourselves in the cellar of affliction, our wine is what God is doing in our lives and what He will do for us as result of the trial.

We can anticipate with joy what God will bring to pass as result of our trials. James is telling us to turn our tears into triumphant expressions of joy. Things may be hard now, but just look down the road!

Secondly, we see,

B. Our Willful Participation.

There is one final thing I point out in what James said. He tells us in verse 4 to *“let patience have her perfect work.”* James is calling for our cooperation in what God is doing. No one likes trials. No one enjoys trials. Yet, we must allow God to do what He wants in our life. We must trust Him. We must yield to His plan. We must submit

to His work in our life.

Again, when it is all said and done, the trial will be worth it. Instead of fighting what God allows to happen in our life, view it as an indication of God's love and interest in our life. Let Him work as He wills and produce in our lives that He plans.

We will face dark times in our life, but we must never forget that if we want to experience the joy that can be found in trials, the dark times are necessary. Turn your tears into triumph and count it all joy when you experience trials. This is the trail of trials.

We all have found ourselves in situations where we wanted to cry “Help!” Beginning in verse 5, James tells us how to pray and what to ask for when trials come. James tells us that we should ask for wisdom.

You might be thinking, “That’s a strange thing to ask for when you are neck-deep in adversity and affliction. I like the prayer for “help” better.” Yet, as we consider the passage we will see that wisdom is exactly what we should ask for when we are facing trials. Wisdom is not knowledge. It is possible to have knowledge and not have wisdom.

We live in a day and time when man’s knowledge is expanding rapidly.

Man’s knowledge has made him capable of doing things that defies imagination. Yet the knowledge explosion of our generation does not necessarily translate into man being wiser. A person can have a PhD from Harvard or Yale and not be wise. One can know a lot about certain things and be considered an expert in a certain field, yet not be wise. Wisdom is not knowledge. Wisdom is not education. Wisdom is not the possession of information.

. Most are familiar with the name Albert Einstein. He is considered one of the greatest intellects this world has ever known. In fact, when he died his brain was removed from his body and dissected in search of learning why some people are intellectually superior. There is no question that Einstein was a brilliant man, but I am not so sure that he was all that wise. At a conference attended by outstanding churchmen and scientists, he said, “In their struggle for the ethical good, teachers of religion must have the stature to give up the doctrine of a personal God.”

Now you can have an exceptionally high I.Q., and have such intellectual capacities that men would want to study your brain after you are dead, but at the same time actually be a fool. What do I mean? The Bible says, *“The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God...”*

“Education without instruction in religious and moral principles will merely result in a race of clever devils.” Job said in Job 32:9, *“Great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment.”*

. Wisdom is “the God-given insight into our human circumstances and situations that enables man to see God’s will...” In other words, wisdom is seeing life from

God's point of view. When James talks about wisdom he is talking about seeing our trials from God's point of view and evaluating our trials from His perspective. Understanding this wisdom, let's move into the text and learn more about this God-given insight.

First consider...

1. WHY WISDOM IS REQUIRED!

Unless there is within us that which is above us, we will soon yield to that which is around us. That is exactly what James is talking about. When he talks about wisdom he is talking about something within us that comes from above that equips and enables us to deal with that which is around us.

As we think about this wisdom, notice first:

A. The Lack Of Wisdom.

Notice verse 5 and the words, "If any of you lack wisdom..." The word "lack" speaks of something that is "absent or missing." In this case, it speaks of the absence of wisdom. It is very obvious that James views an absence of wisdom as a serious matter. Trials always have a divine purpose in our life. Wisdom enables us to look at our trials with the understanding that our trials are not without rhyme and reason. Wisdom equips us to face our trials and enables us to trust God with the purpose and end result of our trials.

When facing trials, it is important to know how to cope with them. The only way that we will be able to understand these trials and respond to them properly is to ask for the wisdom which God alone can give us.

Understanding this, one can see why it is important that we have wisdom when we are going through trials. If we cannot or do not see that trials have a divine purpose, our trials can make us bitter, leaving us frustrated, discouraged, and complaining. But on the other hand, wisdom allows us to understand that our trials are working on our behalf and are for our benefit. In a nutshell, James tells us trials will come, therefore we need to pray for more than "help." We need to pray for wisdom so we can see those trials from a divine perspective and be able to face those trials.

Wisdom equips us for trials. Wisdom enables us to face trials. A lack of wisdom leaves us unable to see the trials for what they are and leaves us without the ability to face and cope with the trials.

Secondly, notice:

B. The Longing For Wisdom.

James says in verse 5, *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God...”* The particular word “ask” is the common word for asking. Yet it means more than just asking for something. The word carries the idea of “desiring, craving, or begging.” James is telling us that our asking for wisdom comes from a longing for wisdom. When we face the trials of life we should ask God for wisdom. We should ask with a deep desire that God give us what we need to understand and face our trials.

This is why wisdom is required when we face trials. Again, wisdom is the ability to understand that trials have a divine purpose and the ability to face our trials and go through them.

Secondly consider....

2. WHERE WISDOM IS RECEIVED!

Wisdom is a “God-given insight.” This wisdom does not come from within us or from any human or earthly resource. This wisdom only comes from God. James says in verse 5, *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God...”* You can’t get this wisdom from reading a book. You can’t get it from going to Seminary. You can’t get it from a counselor. It only comes from God.

Are you going through some trial? Then you need wisdom. Where does this wisdom come from? It comes from God. How do we get this wisdom? We ask God for it. Notice what James says about this wisdom.

First, he tells us that:

A. Wisdom Comes From A Giving God.

James says in verse 5 that God, *“giveth to all men.”* God is a great giver! Notice James 1:17, *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”* God’s giving is expressed in many ways and realized in many ways. The “good” and “perfect” gifts that we enjoy all come from the hand of God. He is the one who gives—and in this case, gives wisdom.

Do you need wisdom? Then ask for wisdom. God will give you wisdom if you ask.

Secondly, he tells us that:

B. Wisdom Comes From A Generous God.

James tells us that God gives *“liberally.”* The word “liberally” speaks of “bountiful” giving. The word literally means, “to stretch out.” It pictures God stretching or spreading out a table. He bountifully and liberally bestows His gifts upon us. The Psalmist said in Psalm 68:19, *“Blessed be the Lord, who daily*

loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah.”

Do you need wisdom? Ask God for wisdom and He will not only give you wisdom but wisdom in abundance.

Thirdly, he tells us that:

C. Wisdom Comes From A Gracious God.

James also tells us in verse 5 that when we ask for wisdom that God *“upbraideth not.”* The word *“upbraideth”* means that God does not *“scold”* us for asking. You can come to God as many times as you want and never have to worry about Him saying, *“Why are coming back again? You just asked me yesterday for something.”*

Wisdom comes from God. It is a God-given insight and a God-given ability to face the trials of life. Wisdom only comes from a giving, generous, and gracious God.

Thirdly, we see:

3. WHEN WISDOM IS REFUSED!

James tells us that wisdom is free for the asking, but then continues by explaining the conditions of our asking. We can ask for wisdom but we must ask in a certain way in order to received wisdom.

First, notice that James speaks of:

A. Unbelieving Prayer.

We read in verse 6, *“But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.”* We are told that we must ask in faith. When should not ask in doubt or unbelief. We are not to waver in our asking. The words, *“nothing wavering,”* simply mean, *“do not doubt.”* James describes the person who doubt’s like the waves of the sea. They are up and down, tossed about by the wind.

The lack of faith will leave us hot one day and cold the next; up one day and down the next; in one day and out the next. We are to pray in faith, which simply means that when we pray we must believe that God will give us the wisdom for which we ask.

In verse 8 we see that James speaks of those who do not believe when they pray as a double-minded man. We read, *“A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.”* The word *“double-minded”* literally mean, *“two-souls.”* There is a divided heart. There is a part that says, *“I believe”* and a part that says, *“I doubt.”*

James says such a person is unstable in all his ways. Again, he is up and down

like the waves of the sea.

But notice further that he speaks of:

B. Unanswered Prayer.

Why is faith necessary when we ask for wisdom? Notice verse 7, *“For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.”* Who is “that man?” It is the doubting man. James says that if we will not have faith when we pray that we are not to even think that God will answer our prayer. If we will not ask in faith, we might as well not ask at all. We will not receive one thing from God if we do not ask in faith. Our prayers will be unanswered.

Are you going through a trial? Then you need to ask God for wisdom. You need to ask God in faith, believing that He will give you wisdom. You need to ask for wisdom so that you will be able to face your trial and cope with your trial. You need wisdom to be able to see that your trial is not without purpose. Wisdom will enable you to look at your trial from God’s perspective and when you see it from God’s perspective, you will face your trial with a different attitude.

I have always related songs to certain people who I have heard sing that particular song at the time it really registered with me. I remember the first person I heard sing “The Family of God” Dan Key, a young preacher in the Bible College class that I was privileged to teach. He also attended church with us and he sang that song one Sunday morning. This was probably in the early 1970’s. But I remember it almost like it was yesterday. Let’s approach these verses as **FAMILY!**

First, we see something:

1. ENJOYED BY ALL IN THE FAMILY!

In verse 2 we saw of how he addressed believers as “brethren.” In verse 9 he again refers to believers as “brothers.” We see the words, “Let the brother.” The word “brother” speaks of those “from the same womb.” When we speak of those that are brothers and sisters we are speaking of those who have the same mother. They are from the same womb. In this case, James is speaking of those who have the same Father.

When you speak of the family of God you are speaking of every person who has experienced God’s saving grace and has been redeemed through the saving work of Christ, thus God is their Heavenly Father. As believers we enjoy a relationship with one another through Christ. We are brothers and sisters in the Lord.

As you look carefully at what James said we see that there is:

A. A DIVERSITY IN THE FAMILY.

Even though believers are members of the family of God, brothers and sisters in Christ, and we all come from the same spiritual womb, there is diversity among us. In the case before us, James speaks of two classes of people within the family. In verse 9, James describes those that are poor. He speaks of the brother of “low degree.” In verse 10 he speaks of those that are rich: “But the rich.”

In this case, there is diversity in the social status of the family. There are some that have very little and lived in depressed conditions while there are those who have a lot and live in comfortable conditions. Some are poor and others are rich.

The range of diversity within the family of God is wide. There are not only social conditions such as James describes, but there are educational differences, racial differences, national differences, vocational differences, political differences, and

the list goes on.

Yet we see there is:

B. A UNITY IN THE FAMILY.

Even though there is diversity in the family, there is unity, for as James describes, whether rich or poor, we are brothers and sisters in Christ. One unique feature of the family of God is that salvation is a great leveler of all mankind. One is not saved because they are poor and neither is one saved because they are rich. They are both saved because they were sinners in need of a Saviour.

There is diversity but there is also unity. We are all equal in the eyes of God for with God there is no respecter of persons (Cp. Romans 2:11) and we are all on equal ground with God. We are not rich or poor in our standing with God, but one and equal. It is this “brotherhood” that is enjoyed by all in the family.

Secondly, notice that there is something:

2. EXPERIENCED BY ALL IN THE FAMILY!

It is important to remember that James is continuing his discussion of trials. He has not shifted gears at this point and is still talking to believers about trials they will experience in their life. As we noticed in verse 2, James tells us that trials are certain. It is not a matter of “if” trials will come but “when.” Now in verses 9-11, He tells us everyone in the family experiences trials. It matters not if a person is poor or rich, trials will come.

Notice:

A. THE HUMBLE CONDITIONS OF THE BELIEVER IN POVERTY.

In verse 9 he speaks of the “brother of low degree.” The words “of low degree” literally mean, “one who does not rise far from the ground.” Metaphorically it speaks of one that is depressed. James is speaking of one who lives in very humble conditions, someone who is very poor.

Church history shows that many of the members of the early church were from the lowest economic levels of society. It is very possible that these humble conditions were brought about by persecution. In our day and time, being a Christian can have financial advantages. A company can advertise itself as a Christian company or a businessman can advertise himself as a Christian and gain customers from the Christian community.

But in Bible days you didn’t wear pins on your lapel that read, “Jesus is Alive” or put bumper stickers on your chariot that read, “Honk if you love Jesus.” In those days, being a Christian oftentimes created financial hardships. If you were a

Christian, people would not trade with you and in many cases would not sell to you. If you were a Christian you were ostracized by society.

Whatever the case there were those who lived in abject poverty. They faced the day in and day out battle of making ends meet. There are many within the family of God that carry the burden of having very little and the struggle of making ends meet week after week and month after month. Such burden can be the trial that is faced by a believer.

Notice also:

B. THE HUMBLING CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE BELIEVER WITH PLENTY.

In verse 10 James speaks of the rich being “made low.” The word “low” literally means, “in his humility.” Notice carefully James says that the rich are “made low.” James is telling us that wealth and prestige do not exempt a person from trials. Things can happen that can humble even the rich. Even the rich can find themselves facing trials that can bring them low.

It is very possible that James is indicating that those who were rich lost everything because they were Christians. Whatever the case, the rich were “made low.” There were things that happened in their life that humbled them.

Trials are a great leveler of people. Both the poor and the rich face trials in their life. Regardless of one’s social standing in life, trials show no favoritism. Trials are something experienced by all in the family.

Thirdly, notice that there is something:

3. EXPRESSED BY ALL IN THE FAMILY!

We saw in verse 2 that the believer is to “count it all joy” when they face trials. Now in verse 9 he tells us that whether one is poor or rich they are to “rejoice” whatever the conditions or circumstances they are facing. The word “rejoice” means, “let him boast.” Now when James is talking about the believer boasting he is not talking about boasting in a prideful way.

James is not talking about spiritual pride. When he spoke of rejoicing he was speaking of something in which you have the right to be proud. Consider.

First we see that he says:

A. LET THE BELIEVER IN POVERTY REJOICE IN HIS EXALTATION.

He says in verse 9, “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted.” James was telling them that even though they were in humble conditions, they were spiritually rich. They had been exalted! They had been lifted high! The world

may look at them as living in a low position but God had given them a high position.

There are many believers that cannot boast in wealth or fame, but they can boast in the fact that they are God's child and enjoy and experience things this world knows nothing about.

If you are saved rejoice in who you are and what you have in Christ Jesus. Even when trials come you can rejoice in the fact that you are a child of God, a member of God's family and heaven is your eternal home. Things may get bad and even go from bad to worse, but the Christian still has reason to rejoice.

James also says:

B. LET THE BELIEVER WITH PLENTY REJOICE IN HIS HUMILIATION.

James tells the poor to rejoice in verse 9 and then in verse 10 says, "But the rich, in that he is made low." James is telling the rich to rejoice in the fact that he has been humbled. He explains his instruction by giving an illustration in verses 10-11. He speaks of the "flower of the grass" in verse 10. James was speaking of the wild flowers that carpeted the hillsides.

James said in verse 11, , " For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways." After the spring rains, these flowers covered the hillside in their beauty. But when the hot dry spell came they withered up and died.

James compared the short life span of these flowers to the rich man and says in the latter part of verse 11, "so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways." The words "ways" means, "travels." James was speaking of the rich man coming to the end of his journey.

James describes how the "made low" experience of the rich man had brought him to a place of realizing that there was more in life than money. He had been made to realize that there was more to life than ones wealth. He had come to the conclusion that he would only have his money for a short time, and what really mattered was his relationship to God. The trials the rich had experienced had taught them that money was not the most important thing in life. Their trials had taught them that what mattered were eternal things.

A young man said to a millionaire, "You are to be envied more than anyone I know." The millionaire asked, "Why so?" The young man replied, "Sir, you are a millionaire. Think of the thousands your income brings in every month." "Well, what of it," said the millionaire. "All I can get out of it is my food and clothes, and

I can't eat more than one man's allowance, and wear more than one suit of clothes at time. Even you can do as much as I can." The young man said, "Ah, yes, but think of the hundreds of fine houses you own, and the rentals they bring." "What better am I off for that?" replied the millionaire. "I can only live in one house at a time; as for the money I receive for rents, why, I can't eat or wear it; I can only use it to buy other houses for other people to live in; they are the beneficiaries, not I." After a little more discussion the millionaire said to the young man, "I can tell you that the less you desire in this world, the happier you will be. All my wealth can't buy a single day more of life—cannot buy back my youth, cannot procure me power to keep off the hour of death; and then what will all avail, when in a few short years at most, I must lie down in the grave and leave it all forever? Young man, you have no cause to envy me."

There is more to life than money and things. Yet, it is such things as these that people live for the most. James tells the rich to rejoice in the circumstances that brought them to a place where they realized there is more to life than money. Trials have a way of making a person get their priorities right. Trials have a way of making us see what is important. For the rich that have been made to see what it important, James says rejoice.

There is something all the family enjoys, experiences and can express. Trials always have a good outcome.

5 James 1:12 / A Cross for a Crown

When James began his letter, he addressed it not to a “sheltered” people but to a “scattered” people. He identified the recipients of his letter as those who had encountered and experienced adversity in their life. The primary readers of his letter were Jewish and they were as one writer defined, a people of “compulsory transplantings.” In other words, their being scattered throughout the world was not of their own choosing. They had not left their homeland in search of better jobs or living conditions.

As a result of the great persecution that broke out against the Christian Church at Jerusalem with Saul of Tarsus as the its main instigator, Christians were forced to leave their homes and flee to other towns. We read in Acts 8:3, “*As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and having men and women committed to prison.*” The verb “havock” is descriptive of a wild animal mangling its prey. Paul vented his hatred of the Church without mercy. Like an angry lion devouring its prey, Christians found themselves the victims of his attacks.

In view of the circumstances of the people to whom he is writing, it is not surprising that the first twelve verses of the letter deal with trials. Our text verse (Vs.12) concludes his section on trials and it is like he is summing up everything he has said about a believer and his trials.

How does James sum up what he has to say about trials? In verse 12 he tells us:

1. DON'T LET TRIALS DEFEAT YOU!

He says in verse 12, “*Blessed is the man that endureth temptations.*” When James speaks of temptation he is not referring to temptation as we normally think of, such as, a solicitation to do evil. After speaking of “divers temptations” in verse 1, in verse 2 he refers to the “trying of your faith.” In verse 12 after using the word “temptation” he refers to one that is “tried.” The temptations that James refers to are the trials that believers go through in life.

Notice more carefully what he says about these trials. First, he speaks of our:

A. Expectancy of Trials.

As we have repeatedly stated in our previous studies, James has made it clear that a believer can expect trials to come. Notice that he says in verse 12, “*when he is tried.*” It is not “if” but once again we see it is “when.” James began this

section in verse 2 by saying, *“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.”* At the very beginning he told us to expect trials. As he closes this section on trials he once again reminds us of the certainty of trials.

James wants us to know that trials are unavoidable in our life. As we saw in our last study it matters not if a person is rich or poor, trials are to be expected. Secondly, he speaks of our:

B. Endurance in Trials.

James speaks of “enduring” the trials that will come in life. The word “endureth” speaks of “standing firm.” The word is made up of a preposition that means “under” and a verb that means, “to abide, to stay.” The word speaks of someone standing up under the trials they face in their life. Instead of escaping our trials, we should endure our trials. James is telling us that regardless of how hard or long our trials may be we are not to let our trials defeat us. We are to stand firm and stand up under our trials.

The nickname of the State of North Carolina is the “Tarheel” State. There are several explanations for why it is called the Tarheel state but it is commonly accepted that the nickname came from the days of the Civil War. It seems that a large group of Confederate soldiers retreated during a battle when things became rather fierce, leaving the N.C. soldiers to fight alone. Supposedly the N.C. soldiers threatened to put tar, a product that was plentiful in N.C., on the heels of the other Confederate soldiers so that they might stick better in the next fight.

The trials of life are not always easy to bear or face, yet we are encouraged to “stick” in the fight. The load does get heavy and the path long, but we are told to stand firm and hold our ground. We should not let our trials defeat us.

God will give us the strength and grace that we need to stand firm. Listen to Isaiah 41:10, *“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”*

Are you going through a trial in your life? Don’t let that trial defeat you. Let the Lord give you strength to enable you to stand firm. Don’t give up. Stand up! Stand up under your trials!

Secondly, James says:

2. DON’T LET TRIALS DISCOURAGE YOU!

As you look at verse 12, you not only see that we should stand up under our trials, but also that we can do so with an encouraged heart and with joy in our

hearts. Notice:

A. The Presence Of Rejoicing In Trials.

We saw in verse 2 that James tells us to “*count it all joy*” when we face trials. He once again reminds us that trials need not discourage us or rob us of our joy. Notice that James begins verse 1 with the word, “Blessed.” The word simply means “happy.” James is telling us that even while we are “enduring” our trials we can be happy. What is happening on the outside does not have to dictate what is felt on the inside. In spite of our trials, we can still rejoice and be happy.

All of us have probably known those who were going through deep and dark valleys, yet never lost their joy. The presence of trials does not have to translate into the absence of happiness. James tells us that we can be “blessed” or happy even though we are going through trials.

You may ask how can a person be happy when they are going through trials. Notice secondly:

B. The Promise Of Reward For Trials.

James tells us that one of the reasons a believer can be happy in trials is because he is promised, “*he shall receive the crown of life.*” How can a person be happy when trials come? We are promised that one day we will trade the old cross for a crown! The crown that James referred to was known as the Victor’s Crown. It was a crown, a wreath, or garland that was placed on someone’s head in honor of victory such as an athlete in the Greek games.

In verse 2-3 James told us that we could count it all joy when we go through trials because we know that our trials were working and producing things in our life as a believer. But now James adds that trials not only have an earthly result but also an eternal reward. James is telling us not to let our trials discourage us for one day there will be a reward for those who endure their trials. Our crosses are not without crowns. Our trials down here may not be easy, but one day they will be worth it for God will bestow upon us the crown of life.

Life down here may not be easy, but one day we will pull into Heaven’s Harbor and then every trial will be worth it all for on that day we will trade the old cross for a crown.

Thirdly, James says:

3. DON’T LET TRIALS DISTRACT YOU!

James not only speaks of the person that endures trials, remains happy in his or her trial, but he also speaks of, “*them that love Him.*” James describes:

A. A Personal Love For The Lord.

His words are directed to “them” that love the Lord. He is speaking of believers that possess a deep love for the Lord. The word that he uses for “love” speaks of a deep love for someone. It is the same word often used to speak of God’s love for us.

He also describes this love as:

B. A Perpetual Love For The Lord.

The love that James describes is a continual and perpetual love for the Lord. It is literally, “to those loving Him.” Here is someone that has gone through great trials but they still love the Lord. Trials have not distracted them. Their eyes have not been taken off the Lord.

A person may be tempted to commit a certain sin but not have the opportunity to fulfill their temptation. On the other hand, a person may have opportunity to commit a certain sin but not be tempted. It is when the two get together that you have trouble.

In our text James speaks of temptation and the trouble caused when the two come together. He used the word "temptation" twice in the previous verses but did so with the ideal of the trials believers face (Cp. verses 2 & 12). Now, beginning in verse 13 he refers to temptation in the sense that we often think of when we use the word "temptation." James now uses the word in the sense of a solicitation to do wrong.

James tells us why it is important to resist temptation. Let's notice the text.

1. THE PRESENCE OF TEMPTATION!

James spoke of "trials" as a definite matter (Cp. Vs.2). He now speaks of "temptation" as a definite experience. Notice carefully verse 13, *"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."* Notice carefully that he does not say "if" but "when." It is not a matter of if temptation will come, but when.

He spoke of trials as something experienced by every man (Cp. Vs.9-10) and he now speaks of temptation as the experience of "every man." We read in verse 14, *"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed."* James speaks of "every man."

1 Cor. 10:13, says *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man."* "common" speaks of that which is human, that which is after man. It matters not if you are young or old, rich or poor, man or woman, temptation involves "every man."

The kinds of temptation may change. Candies for kids, sensuality for the young, riches for the middle-aged, and power for the aging...As long as you live, you will be tempted."

Notice more carefully what James had to say about the presence of temptation...

A. Temptation Cannot Be Attributed to God

Again notice verse 13, *"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."* There were some in James day who

taught that God was indirectly responsible for the existence of evil in the world. Some Jewish rabbi's taught what was called *yetzher ha'ra*, which means "evil impulse." They taught that this "evil impulse" was part of man's original created nature, thus God was indirectly responsible for temptation.

Some seem to suggest that God is responsible for the wild and strong passions of man and these passions were often the target of temptation. Yet James tells us that no man can say that God is responsible for temptation. James was saying, "Don't even remotely suggest that God has anything to do with your temptations." The very idea is absurd. Why?

For one thing, God Himself lacks the capacity to be tempted. God cannot be tempted. He has no vulnerability to evil and is utterly impregnable to its onslaughts. Secondly, God does not tempt us to sin. We can't blame God for temptation.

We have heard those in the homosexual community say, "God made me this way." To justify such a theory is to severely twist and pervert the scripture. God is not directly or indirectly responsible for temptation, or the sin that results from temptation.

Secondly notice:

B. Temptation Cannot Be Avoided By Man

Again, "every man" experiences temptation. Why? James speaks of the desires that we have. He speaks of "lusts." When we hear or use the word it is always associated with illicit desires. The word James used refers to a deep, strong desire or longing of any kind, good or bad.

It is true that God created within man certain desires. We thirst and hunger. Those are God-given desires. We have a desire to be happy. We are attracted to the opposite sex. God made us that way. He put within us this attraction or desire. All of these are God-given desires. They are not bad desires, but good. But with the entrance of sin there arose a system that seeks to get us to fulfill those desires in a way God never intended they be fulfilled.

The fulfillment of God-given desires outside of God's plan is to accept a second rate fulfillment (faulty product), and as we shall see, at a high price. We must all understand that we all have certain desires and longings. James speaks of them as our "own lusts." One thing may be a temptation to one person but not a problem for someone else. What is a problem to you, may not be a problem to others. There are our "own individual and personal lusts."

Three preachers were talking while out fishing. One suggested they confess their sins one to the other. One said, "That's a good idea. I'll go first. I hate to admit it, but I take an occasional drink." The second spoke up and said, "I would not want others to know about it, but I like to gamble." They both looked at the third preacher and said, "We have confessed our sins, now its your turn." The third said, "My sin is gossip and I can't wait to get back to town." We all have our "own lusts." There are those particular problem areas of specific temptations we personally have to deal with.

1 John 2:16 we are given a trinity of temptation. John speaks of the "lust of the flesh." This describes a consuming passion to do. Secondly, he speaks of the "lust of the eyes." This describes a consuming passion to have. Lastly, he speaks of the "pride of life," which describes a consuming passion to be.

All temptation could be placed into one or all of these categories. They all describes a world system that is constantly pulling at us to fulfill the longings we have been given by God outside of His plan. These temptations seek to get us to abuse God given longings.

Again, the point is that no one is immune to temptation. The words of the Lord Jesus in John 3:6 are just as true today: "that which is born of the flesh is flesh" – and it will always be flesh! I may work on the flesh and seek to improve it. I may educate the flesh and seek to add many social graces to its basic content. But when all is said and done, it is still the flesh..."

What was he saying? No matter who or when, temptation is present and a constant force to be reckoned with.

Secondly notice:

2. THE PROCESS OF TEMPTATION!

In verse 14, we are not only reminded of the presence of temptation but

we also see the process. We see how temptation works or how we are tempted. James uses the picture of a hunter and a fisherman to describe the process of temptation. He speaks of being “*drawn away*” and being “*enticed*.” He has spoken of “lusts” and now he speaks of “lures.”

A. Luring The Believer Away (Enticement).

The words "drawn away" speak of being snared in a trap. The picture is that of a hunter setting a baited trap. There is a steel trap that would be alarming rather than attractive to the hunted prey. To draw the prey to the trap, the hunter puts something inside the trap to appeal to the desires of the animal and to lure them away from their course and into to the trap.

Understanding temptation is to realize that the pull of our flesh and the world has the goal of getting us to fulfill our desires in ways God condemns, and has the ultimate goal of pulling us away and drawing us away from God.

We as believers seek to serve God, honor and loving Him, yet the world and the flesh is continually seeking to draw us away from and to interrupt our fellowship with God. This is the aim and objective of temptation. We also see the matter of:

B. Luring The Believer In (Entrapment).

The word "enticed" is a fishing term that speaks of baiting the hook. The fisherman knows that a bare hook will not be attractive to the fish. So he puts a nice juicy worm on the hook. Mr. Fish comes swimming along and the bait is too attractive to resist, it appeals strongly to his desires, so he is drawn away and then drawn in. He takes the bait, but in the bait is a hook.

Temptation is not only a process of being drawn away (from God) but also being drawn in (into sin). I remind you that the devil is a pro at fishing. He knows the kind of bait to use on each of us. He is very skillful in knowing what appeals to our desires. He knows what to put in the trap and put on the hook to draw us away and draw us in.

The devils bait is always tempting, but we must never forget the price for taking his bait. This leads us to the third things James speaks of in our text. Notice:

3. THE PRODUCT OF TEMPTATION!

1. We read in verse 15, "*Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth*

sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. James describes the product or end result of yielding to temptation. Notice:

A. The Conception Of Sin.

The word "conceived" describes a woman conceiving a child. Up to this point, James has described someone being tempted. The devil has baited his hooks and traps to entice us. At this point no sin has been committed. It is not a sin to be tempted. It is a sin when we yield to temptation. This conception speaks of a person yielding to temptation in their heart and mind. There is that moment when the will joins the desire, but at this moment sin is only conceived.

What is this conception? A person begins to think about it, imagine it, and then within; the decision is made to yield.

Think of David and his sin of adultery with Bathsheba (Cp. 2 Sam. 11). We read in verse 2, "he saw." A naked woman bathing was the temptation. At this point no sin had been committed. But we read in verse 3 that David "sent and enquired." It was at that moment that sin was conceived. David begin to think about the woman he saw. Whenever sin is conceived it is only a matter of time when there will be a birth to sin. We read in verse 4 that David "took her." He yielded first in his heart and mind, and it was not long before what was conceived was born.

D.L. Moody said: "You can't keep a bird from flying over your head, but you can keep it from building a nest in your hair." We may not be able to avoid temptation, but we can prevent its conception. Furthermore we see:

B. The Conclusion Of Sin.

We see that once sin is conceived it "bringeth forth." The words literally mean, "ceases to be pregnant." There is the birth that I have been describing. What is the result of this birth? When the sin has been yielded to, James tells us the fruit and result is "death."

Physical death is the concept. The word is descriptive of a "stillbirth." Sin never produces what it claims it will or what you think it will. Sin always paints a pretty picture. It always tells you that it will make you happy. Or, to put in other words, sin will tell you that it will give birth to joy and happiness. But sin always produces stillbirths. You yield to that which you think will fulfill your desires but what you end up with is a stillborn experience.

Death here literally means “separation.” You find yourself separated from God and the things of God. You find yourselves separated from real joy and real happiness.

Is it no wonder that James says in verse 16, “*Do not err.*” The words means, “don’t be pulled away.” James is telling us not to let Satan's bait pull us away. As believers we should always remember that temptation plus opportunity equals trouble. Temptation can result in Trouble!

We read in verse 16, *“Do not err, my beloved brethren.”* The verse is a pivotal verse between verses 15 and 17. It is telling us not to err or stray in light of what has been said in the previous verses and what is being stated in the following verses. In other words, the verse is giving us two reasons why we should not err as believers.

First, we should not err in light of what sin will do to us. In the preceding verses, James spoke of temptation and the consequences of yielding to temptation. He tells us in verse 15, *“Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”* In light of such consequences, we should not err.

Secondly, we should not err in light of all that God gives us. In the text before us we are told that God is a giving God. Throughout the Bible we are reminded of God’s giving. The familiar John 3:16 is a wonderful reminder of God’s giving: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

Romans 8:32 declares, *“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”* God is a giving God and we all are recipients of His giving. Therefore, in light of all He gives us, we should not err.

We should not err in light of the grief that we see in sin and the goodness that we see in God. Sin is grievous and God is gracious and both serve as a reason not to err. What sin will do to us and what God gives us is motives for not erring.

Let’s consider verses 17-18 and consider what James had to say about God’s giving. First we see:

1. A DECLARATION OF GOD’S GIVING!

We read in verse 17, *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”* James reminds us that God is a giving God.

Guy King, in his commentary on James, tells of a legend of an ancient kingdom whose king had died. Ambassadors were sent to choose a successor from two twin infants. They found the little fellows fast asleep, and, looking at them, found it difficult to decide which one should be made

king. But then, they noticed that one of the infants had his tiny fists closed tight and the other slept with his little hands opened. They choose the infant with the open hands and the infant grew to be known as “The King with the Open Hand.”

Our text tells us that our God is not the “God of the clutched fist” but the “God with the Open Hand.” Our God is a giving God. He is a God, as we shall see, that gives and gives and gives. As the songwriter put it, “He giveth and giveth and giveth again.” Notice more carefully what verse 17 says about God’s giving.

A. God Is Unchanging In His Giving!

James declares the unchanging giving of God in both His name and nature. In our text He is given the name, “the Father of lights.” The name refers to God as the Giver of light in the form of the sun, moon, and stars.

Genesis 1:16 describes God creating these lights: *“And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.”* God is the Creator, or as James states, the Father of these lights. He created the sun and moon for the specific purpose of dividing the day from the night and also for the purpose of providing light for the earth. Genesis 1:17 states: *“And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth.”*

James is a master of illustrating and he uses this astronomical picture to illustrate a great truth about God. As Guy King says, “He calls the heavenly orbs to his assistance in order to elucidate his point.” What is his point? He is declaring that God is unchanging in His giving.

He states that in God there, *“is no variableness.”* The word “variableness” means there is no “variation or change” with God. God is an unchanging God. God said in Malachi 3:6, *“For I am the Lord, I change not...”* The same truth is stated of the Lord Jesus in Hebrews 13:8, *“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.”*

Theologians often use the term, “the Immutability of God,” referring to the changelessness of God. God does not change in His essence. There is no alteration or variation to His substance. He is an unchanging God.

As the first American astronaut prepared to go into space, one reporter asked, “What are you depending on most in your venture?” No doubt, the reporter expected the astronaut to say something about the quality of his equipment, his navigational skills, or the people at the space center. But

instead, he replied, “That God will not change His laws.”

God will not change for He cannot change. He cannot change for the worse, for He is holy. He cannot change for the better, for He is perfect. As A.W. Pink said: “God cannot change for the better, for He is already perfect; and being perfect, He cannot change for the worse.”

Things are constantly changing but God never changes. The Bible says in Psalm 102:25-27, *“Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.”*

James illustrates the unchanging nature of God by referring to the sun God created. There are times when we do not see the sun. Our earth is spinning on its axis; therefore, there are certain hours when the part of the earth on which we live is turned toward the sun and certain hours when it is turned away from the sun. This gives us our days and night.

But even though there are certain hours when we do not see the sun, the sun is still shining. What changes is the earth, not the sun. It may be night to us, but on the other side of the planet it is day. The sun is always shining. That never changes. The same is true of God. He is always God. He never changes.

There are times when the sun is eclipsed and the light of the sun is dimmed or blackened out, but that is not due to the sun ceasing to shine. That is due to the moon coming between the earth and the sun. There may be times when the light of God may not be seen, but that is always due to the fact that something comes between God and us. He never changes. We are the ones that change.

James had this idea in mind when he stated that in God there is *“neither shadow of turning.”* It literally means, “or shadow as a result of turning.” A shadow is cast as the result of the earth changing its position, but the sun remains the same. God is like the sun—He never changes. There is no turning on His part. He is unchangeable.

Notice also that we see that:

B. God Is Unceasing In His Giving!

In verse 17 we see that the gifts God gives *“is from above”* and these gifts

“cometh down.” God’s gifts originate in Himself. We will look at these gifts more in detail a bit later, but we see that all that is good and perfect originates in God. All that comes from God is good and perfect because God is in Himself good and perfect. God’s giving could not be anything less for God cannot be anything less.

James tells us that that which is above comes down. Again, we see that God gives! But here is what I want you to see. The words “cometh down” are in the continuous present tense meaning God continues to give. He never ceases to give, not for a single moment. God’s giving is not occasional but constant. He is always giving and will always be giving. There will never be a moment when He is not giving.

On March 27, 1808, a grand performance of the *Creation* took place in Vienna, and the composer himself, Franz Joseph Haydn, who was 76, was able to be in attendance. He was so feeble that he had to be wheeled into the theater in a chair. As the chorus and orchestra burst with full power into the passage, “And there was light,” the crowd burst into applause and cheers, turning to the great composer to show their appreciation. The old composer was seen striving to raise himself. Once on his feet, he mustered up all his strength and, in reply to the applause of the audience, cried out as loudly as he could, “No, no! Not from me, but,” pointing to heaven, “from thence—from heaven above—comes all!” He then fell back in his chair, faint and exhausted, and had to be carried from the room.

All that is good and perfect comes from above and God is always giving us that which is good and perfect. God is unchanging and unceasing in His giving.

1. A Declaration Of God’s Giving!

2. A DESCRIPTION OF GOD’S GIFTS!

We not only have in our text a declaration that God is a giving God, but we also see a description of the gifts He gives. Because these gifts come from above, come from God, there is a divine quality and value about these gifts. There are three particular gifts that are referred to in our text. Notice first of all:

A. God’s Profitable Gifts.

Verse 17 speaks of **“Every good gift.”** The word “good” speaks of that which is, “gentle, noble.” It implies that the gift is “beneficial for the

recipient.” All that God gives us is for our benefit.

I think of 1 Tim. 6:17, *“Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.”* All the things we receive from God are for our full enjoyment and benefit.

We could say that God wants to enrich us through His giving. All that He gives to us brings eternal riches and benefits to our life. As the Psalmist said in Psalm 103:2, *“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”*

I find it interesting that the word “good” is a word that has no regular degrees of comparison. A child may speak of that which is “gooder” or “goodest.” May I say that when it comes to God’s good gifts, there are no “gooder” or “goodest” gifts than the gifts we receive from God.

We have looked at the subject of temptation. Temptation in a nutshell is this world and flesh trying to lure us away from God with the ideal that there is something better or something that is more enjoyable. Let me say it this way: “It don’t get any better than what God gives!”

God’s gifts are “good.” They are profitable and beneficial. They bring rich blessings into our life. They impart to us divine blessings, blessing that are from above.

Furthermore we see:

B. God’s Purposeful Gifts.

Verse 17 also speaks of *“every perfect gift.”* When we think of something being perfect we think of that which is without a flaw, fault or defect. It is true that God’s gifts are without fault or defect, but the word used here carries a different meaning.

The word speaks of the result, fulfillment, completion, and consummation. In other words, the gifts of God have as their end the accomplishment of God’s purpose in our lives. The giving and gifts of God are not lavished upon us without purpose or reason. They are given for our benefit and to bring about His divine purpose in our life.

There are many reasons why God gives to us, but let me point out just three reasons. For one thing, His giving and gifts are designed to increase our adoration of Him. His giving makes us love Him more. The more He gives, the more we love Him. He is constantly winning our hearts through

His giving and gifts.

He also gives to increase our appreciation for Him. The more He gives the more we find ourselves grateful and appreciative of Him. The more we understand how undeserving we are of all He gives to us and does for us, the greater the depth of our appreciation.

Lastly, but not least, He gives to increase our consecration to Him. His giving and gifts only make us want to serve Him and follow Him. In light of all He does for us and gives to us, how can we withhold from Him anything He asks?

God's giving and gifts are perfect. They always have a divine end and goal in mind. God gives so that we might enjoy heavenly benefits and He gives to bring to pass His plans for our life.

Let me remind you that God's perfect gifts may come in the form of a trial. As we have seen, James has a lot to say about trials. Let me once again point you to verse 4: *"But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."* We see our word "perfect" again. It is the same word found in verse 17. As we saw, trials are a work in our life to bring about and produce certain things in our life.

I think of Paul. Listen to what he said in 2 Corinthians 12:7, *"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure."* Did you notice that he spoke of his thorn in the flesh as something given to him? He described it as a gift to keep him humble.

God's perfect gifts may come in various ways and forms, but they always come with a purpose. His gifts are profitable and purposeful.

Finally, I want you to see what I want to call:

C. God's Paramount Gift.

In verse 18 we see, what is in my opinion, God's greatest gift. We read: *"Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures."* As believers, we have received and continue to receive and will forever be recipients of many wonderful gifts from God. But the greatest of them all was when He saved us.

As John Newton said in his great hymn—*Amazing Grace*:
When we've been there 10,000 years,

***Bright shining as the sun;
We've no less days
To sing God's praise,
Than when we first begun.***

Ten thousand years in eternity, we will still be praising Him for saving us. Ephesians 2:8 tell us that salvation is a gift of God and it is by far the greatest gift we have ever received.

Notice what James has to say about this paramount gift from God. First we see in our salvation the will of God. Verse 18 says, *"Of His own will begat He us."* It literally means, "having willed it." It speaks of a planned course of action, a choice made by God.

What is this planned course of action? First let me say that it is not saying that God willed that some be saved and some not be saved. Henry Ward Beecher used to say, "The elect are whosoever will; the non-elect are the whosoever won't." Salvation is not limited but is available to everyone and anyone who will accept God's gift of salvation.

The Bible tells us that before the foundation of the world God made the choice to send His Son to this earth to die on Calvary's cross that He might provide salvation for all men. It was a choice that God did not have to make. He did not have to give His Son. He could have chosen to let me go to hell because of their own doing and sin. But He willed it. He chose to give His son and planned a course of action whereby men could be saved.

Secondly, we see in our salvation the word of God. The instrument God used to bring us to Christ was His word. Verse 18 tells us that we were begotten (born again) by *"the word of truth."*

The Bible says in Ephesians 1:13, *"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation..."* Also we read in 1 Peter 1:23, *"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever."* As well, Romans 10:17 tells us, *"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."*

What a joy and blessed honor it is to preach God's word, teach God's word, and go out and share God's word. It is the mighty instrument God uses to save people.

Last of all we see in our salvation the work of God. What did salvation do for us? Verse 18 tells us that we are saved, *"that we should be a kind of*

first-fruits of His creatures.” The thought of the first-fruits takes us back to the Jewish system of offerings. In the Old Testament the firstfruits of the harvest and first-born belonged to God.

James has in mind the firstfruits of the harvest. They would bring a sheaf of the wheat and wave it before the Lord as an admission that the whole harvest belonged to God.

Verse 18 is telling us that we belong to God! Salvation has made us the purchased possession of God. I am His and He is mine! We are God people and God’s property.

I think of the familiar story of the little boy who made him a toy sailboat. He carried the little boat out to the pond and began watching it float on the water. However, the wind pulled the little boat away from shore, and all the broken-hearted boy could do was watch it be blown out of reach and sight. Several weeks later he was walking through town and he saw his little toy boat for sale in a store window. He rushed in side and bought the boat and was overheard as he walked down the street hugging his little boat: “You are now mine twice. I made you and now I have bought you.”

Of all God’s gifts, salvation is the greatest. We are His possession.

The Bible is all that the writer described it to be. It is all that anyone can ever need. Yet, the way to experience all that the Bible can mean to you as a believer, is found in the words of the writer: “Just use me.”

If I were to sum up all that James is saying in verses 19-25, it would be, “Just use me.” One survey found that 27 percent of all Americans own at least five Bibles. Yet a poll in *USA Today* found that only 11 percent of Americans read the Bible every day. More than half read it less than once a month or not at all.

Even worse, George Barna conducted a survey of “born again” Christians and found that only 18 percent (2 out of 10) read the Bible every day, and even worse, 23 percent (1 in 4) professing Christians say they never read the Bible.

It is not enough to own a Bible. One must read the Bible and use the Bible. The Bible will do a person no good if all it does is sit on the shelf or coffee table. It must be used.

In our last study, we saw in verse 18, that the Word of God was the instrument of our new birth. We read, “*Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth.*” We were born again through the power of the Word of God. Verse 19 begins with the word “*Wherefore.*” The word indicates that the instructions that are about to be given are given in light of the place the Word of God had in our salvation.

In other words, since the Word of God was an instrument in our conversion, this is what our response should be to the Word. In verses 19-25, we see the part the Bible is to have in our life as a believer. In a nutshell, the Bible is to be used in our life. Let’s look at these 7 verses and notice the place the Word of God is to have in our life as a believer.

1. OUR AFFECTION FOR THE WORD!

In verses 19-21a, the emphasis seems to be on how we feel about the Bible. It speaks of our affection for the Bible that is revealed in our hearing of the Word of God. Luke 8:18 says, “*Take heed therefore how ye hear*” and Mark 4:24 says, “*Take heed what ye hear.*” We are to take heed “how” we hear and “what” we hear.

In the case before us, the emphasis is on how we hear. How are we to

hear? Spiro Zodhiates in his book on James describes four kinds of hearers. There are those that are like a sponge. They suck up good and bad and let both run out immediately. There are those like a sandglass that let what enters in at one ear pass out of the other, hearing without thinking. There are those who are like a strainer, letting go the good, and retaining the bad. Finally, there are those who are like a sieve, letting go the chaff, and retaining the good.

Notice what James has to say about our hearing of the Word and the kind of hearer we should be. First we see that there is to be:

A. Unlimited Hearing.

When it comes to our hearing of the Word, we are to avail ourselves of every opportunity to hear God's Word. There should be an eagerness on our part to take advantage of every opportunity to hear God's Word. Our hearing should not be occasional or irregular. Our hearing should be unlimited. By that, I mean that we should look for and strive for every occasion and opportunity to hear God's Word. We should not limit our opportunities to hear God's word.

In verse 19 James emphasizes this unlimited hearing by describing the response we should have to three particular matters. He tells us that we are to be *"swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger."*

First, let me point out that he describes a slow response on our part. We are to be slow to speak and slow to wrath. First, take the matter of being slow to speak. The wise man Solomon spoke to this matter several different times in Proverbs. We read in:

Proverbs 10:19, *"In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise."*

Proverbs 17:27, *"He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit."*

Proverbs 21:23, *"Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles."*

As believers, we should be cautious and careful when we speak. We are not to rush or be hasty in what we say. We should be slow to speak.

The story is told that on one occasion, a young man came to Socrates to be trained as an orator. At his first meeting with the great teacher, he talked without stopping. Finally, Socrates interrupted him and said,

“Young man, I will have to charge you a double fee.” The young man asked, “A double fee? Why is that?” “I will have to teach you two sciences,” answered Socrates. “First, how to hold your tongue, and then how to use it.”

I have met a few that needed to learn how to hold their tongue and how to use it. We are to be slow to speak.

We are also told to be “*slow to wrath*.” The word “wrath” speaks of more than just becoming angry. Will Rogers once said, “People who fly into a rage always make a bad landing.” In this case, it is more than someone flying into a rage. The word speaks of that which is smoldering in the heart. It is describing someone whose heart is filled with anger and resentment that is smoldering in the heart. It has not burst into flames as of yet, but it is only a matter of time before it does. Indicates one filled with a constant and continuing matter of anger, resentment, jealousy, envy, and such like feelings.

How often we let bitterness, resentment, and anger smolder in our heart. There is someone who has done us wrong or something happened that we didn’t like, and it smolders in our hearts. Instead of extinguishing it we let it smolder.

In verse 20, James adds a comment to this matter of “wrath.” He says, “*For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.*” This smoldering anger is just a breath away from igniting into a flame. When this happens, it never results in actions or behavior that is right in the sight of God. Such actions never accomplish God’s righteous purposes for our life. This person continues acting upon their feelings and personal ideas or process of thinking.

When it comes to speaking or being angry, we should have a slow response. But notice with me that he also spoke of a swift response on our part. He tells us that we should be “*swift to hear*.” He is talking about how we should hear God’s Word. The word “swift” simply means “quick.”

The word is translated from a word from which we get our word “tachometer.” A tachometer or “tach” is an instrument that measures how fast a piece of machinery is operating. When it comes to hearing, we should be quick and hasty to hear God’s Word.

The ideal is that we should quickly, hastily, and swiftly avail ourselves of every opportunity, as one writer said, “to increase our exposure to the

Word.” James tells us that when it comes to speaking and anger, we should be very slow in our response. But when it comes to hearing the Word, we should strive to hear the Word every chance we get.

When it comes to a private exposure of the Word, we should seek every moment and opportunity we can to hear God’s Word. Guy King commented on the words “swift to hear” as “eager learners ever listening for the Spirit’s voice in the inspired pages.” If all you do is move a bookmark when you read the Bible, you haven’t really read the Bible. You only read the Bible when you read it, listening to what God is saying to you in His Word. When you read the Bible you are to read it with the objective of letting God speak to you.

James tells us that we should avail ourselves of every opportunity to hear God’s Word. In simple language, James says, “Every time the Word is preached, you be a present listener. Every time you have a chance to hear God’s Word, seize that opportunity.” There should be unlimited hearing.

Notice secondly that there is to be:

B. Unhindered Hearing

Again in verse 21 we see the word “*Wherefore.*” In light of what has just been said, we are instructed to, “*lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness.*” There is not only to be a response on our part, but a removal as well. Since there is to be an unlimited hearing of the Word, there should also be an unhindered hearing of the Word. Let me explain.

The words “*lay apart*” simply mean, “to put off.” The words are descriptive of taking off a coat or garment. In other words, there are some things that we need to get rid of in our life as it relates to how we hear.

For one thing, we are get rid of all defiling sins. Notice the word “filthiness.” Notice James 2:2: “*For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment.*” The garment of the poor man is called a “vile” garment. The word “vile” comes from the same word as “filthiness” in 1:21. It speaks of that which is dirty. It is descriptive of moral sins. There is to be a removal of any sin that defiles us.

Also, we see that we are to get rid of all deliberate sins. Verse 21 speaks of the “*superfluity of naughtiness.*” The word “superfluity” speaks of that which is in abundance, a surplus. The word “naughtiness” speaks of all

that is bad and pertains to sins that are deliberate.

I find it interesting that the word “superfluity” is the same basic word used in Mark 8:8 to describe the leftovers when Jesus broke the fish and bread and fed the 5,000. A superfluity of naughtiness suggests the ideal of things that are “left over” from our old life.

When we first got saved it did not takes us long to realize that there were some things in our new life that were carried over from our old life. There were some old habits and ways that clung to us. James spoke of anger in verse 19 and our tempers would be one example.

James is telling us to put off or lay apart all that has to do with the old life. We are to get rid of the “leftovers” of our past life. All those things that we do deliberately or out of habit, is to be removed in our life.

What has this to do with out hearing? Notice the word “filthiness” again. As I said, the word speaks of that which is dirty and defiling. But the word has even a deeper meaning. The word is a compound word from which we get the words, “ear wax.”

Verse 19 tells us to be swift to hear, to quickly avail ourselves of every opportunity to hear God’s word. Therefore, we are to remove anything that would hinder us from being able to hear God’s Word. In simple language, get the wax out of your ears so you can hear properly.

Let me sum it up this way. We are to have a great affection for the Word of God. We should love the Word and seek to hear it every chance we get. Since it was the Book God used to save us, we should hear it with great affection and allow nothing to hinder us from hearing the Word.

Let’s move on and notice secondly:

2. OUR ACCEPTANCE OF THE WORD!

1. We read in the latter part of verse 21, “*and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.*” James not only talks about hearing the word, but also receiving the Word. Notice:

A. The Welcome We Are To Give

Notice the word “receive.” It simply means, “to welcome.” Like we would receive or welcome a friend into our home, we should welcome the Word of God in our life.

How are we to welcome the Word? We are to welcome the Word with

“meekness.” The word was used to describe an animal that had been broken and domesticated, such as a wild horse being broken and made submissive to a master.

The ideal is that we are to be submissive to the Word we hear. It is not just enough to read the Bible. We must hear the Bible. Furthermore, it is not just enough to hear, we must submit to what we hear.

We are to welcome what we hear into our hearts and lives. Instead of bucking and snorting, fighting what God says to us in His Word, we are to welcome what He says in our life, willing and heartily submitting to His Word.

Notice secondly:

B. The Work We Are To Grant

Verse 21 calls the Word of God the **“engrafted word.”** It is literally the **“implanted”** word and means, **“to plant a seed in the ground.”** At our conversion the Word was planted in our hearts. Our receiving of the Word with meekness speaks of our allowing the Word to work in our lives.

As believers, the Word has been planted, and we are to provide the soil that will enable the seed to grow in our life. We are to water and fertilize the Word so it can accomplish in our life that which God intended.

What does God intend for His word to accomplish in our life as a believer? Verse 21 speaks of the word, **“which is able to save your souls.”** This saving is not salvation in the sense of getting saved. It is speaking of the continuing work of salvation whereby God’s purposes and plans for our life are accomplished and fulfilled.

We are to seize every opportunity we have to hear God’s Word. We are to welcome God’s Word and submit to what we hear so that the Word of God can work in our life, bear fruit, and bring to pass all God wants for our life.

The believers at Thessalonica are a good example of this truth. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul expressed his thanks for the believers at Thessalonica because of how they received the Word and allowed the Word to work in their life. Paul said: **“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”**

They received the Word and allowed it to work mightily in their life. As

believers, we should not only get into the Bible, but also let the Bible get into us. There is to be an acceptance of the Word.

Finally we see:

3. OUR ABIDING IN THE WORD!

In verse 22 we read the words, *“But be ye.”* The words speak of that which is “continual.” It speaks of that which abides or is habitual in a person’s life. The same thought is found in verse 25 when it speaks of one that “continueth therein.” Again, the ideal is of abiding therein. There is not only to be a proper response and reception to the Word, but also a proper result. We are to abide in the Word.

In verses 22 James speaks of both a “doer” and “hearer” of the Word. He says, *“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”* The word “doer” speaks of more than what a person does. It is a word that characterizes the whole person. It describes what a person becomes, more than what a person does.

The word “doer” speaks of a productive action leading to an actual result. If a person will hear and receive the Word, it will work in their life and bring about certain results in their life. It speaks of what we become as a result of the working of the Word in life as well as what we do.

The word also means “poet.” A poet is one who puts words together in order to express a thought or feeling in a beautiful manner. As we hear the word, receiving a word, then another word, and then another, and so on, it all comes together in our life developing us into a beautiful expression of God’s plans and purposes for His children.

The “doer” is set in contrast to one that is a “hearer” only. The word “hearer” means to audit a class. When a person audits a class, they sit in the classroom, listen to the teacher and learn the subject that is being taught, but does not get a grade or credit for the class.

The Bible is telling us not to be someone who hears but does not get any benefit from what they hear. Again, we are to hear and receive the Word and allow it to work in our life. There are many who attend services each week who hear the Word but never welcome it into their life and allow it to work in them. All they have done is audit the Word they heard.

Beginning in verse 23, further emphasizes this thought of abiding in the Word. First we see:

A. The Picture That Explains Abiding

In verses 23-25, James sets in contrast the “doer” and “hearer only” of the Word. The picture is of each looking into a mirror. The word “glass” in verse 23 speaks of a mirror. In verses 23-24 we see one who is a hearer only: *“For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: [24] For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.”*

This person looks into the mirror and the mirror reveals certain needs in their life. It shows that their face needs to be washed and their hair needs to be combed. But this person does nothing about what the mirror has revealed. As James describes, he sees what needs attending to but does nothing about it and goes their merry way and soon forgets about what needs to be done.

In verse 25 we see one that looks into the mirror and does something about what the mirror reveals: *“But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”*

The mirror again reveals things that need to be attended to and in this case the observer responds to what the mirror reveals and attends to those matters. As James says, he does not become a *“forgetful hearer.”* That is, he does not ignore what is revealed but responds to the needs.

The lesson is that God’s Word is a mirror that reveals needs in our life. As we hear the Word there will be needs exposed and revealed in our life. We can be one who is a hearer only and ignore what is revealed, or we can be a doer and do something about the needs that are revealed.

The word’s *“continueth therein”* in verse 25 indicate the doer of the Word is one that is always responding to what the Word reveals. This person abides in the Word, always allowing it to work in their life and responding to what it says.

Then finally we see:

B. The Promise That Encourages Abiding

What does James say about the person who abides in the Word? He says in verse 25: *“this man shall be blessed in his deed.”* James says that God blesses the one who abides in the Word. Do you want to be blessed

by God? Then hear His word, receive His word, and obey His word.

In light of all James says, I say: "The B-I-B-L-E: THE BOOK OF BENEFIT & BLESSINGS"

Occasionally when I have witnessed to someone I have been asked, “What religion are you,” or “What’s your religion?” I know that what they are asking me is what denomination am I.

In James 1:26-27, we see James talking about religion. The word “religion” is found five times in the New Testament. Two of those occurrences are in our text. The word “religious” is found twice in the New Testament. One of those occasions is in our text,

What does the Bible mean when it talks about religion? At the very beginning let me make it clear that when the Bible speaks of religion, it is not talking about denominations.

I have met a few people that put more stock in their denominational label than they did anything else. I think of a story about three Churches in a little town. There was a Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist Church. They were all struggling to exist. They finally decided that the only way they could survive was to merge. They all gathered to discuss the merger and the question came up what they would name the church. Finally after much discussion and dissension, one suggested that they call it a Christian Church. One fellow jumped up and said, “I was born a Baptist, I grew up a Baptist, I have never been anything but a Baptist, and no one is going to make a Christian out of me.”

Whereas there are some that make a big deal out of their denomination, George Barna stated in his book *Absolute Confusion* that traditional Church affiliations are becoming less significant to people. He found that two-thirds of all adults (62%) believe that “it does not matter what religious faith you follow because all faiths teach similar lessons about life.”

I would not agree with that assessment and believe that it has dangerous implications. However, I will say that there is something more important than what denomination we belong to. I have been asked what I would be if I were not a Baptist and my reply has been very simple. I would be no different than what I am now. I am a Baptist by choice and conviction, but my faith and practice is not based on what the Baptist believes but on what the Bible says. I do not live by the Baptist Faith and Message but by God’s eternal word. { Though I firmly support the current Baptist Faith and Message }

What does the Bible mean when it speaks of religion. The word “religion” as found in our text speaks of the outward and external observance of our faith. It implies that there has something happened internally and is manifested externally. It speaks of the acts, deeds, and service that result from our faith. When we talk about religion we are talking about what we have on the inside reveals itself by what we do on the outside.

As we look at James 1:26-27 we see that he describes two types of religion. We see a religion that is condemned and a religion that is commended. Let’s notice these two verses and notice first of all that James describes a:

1. VAIN RELIGION!

We read in verse 26, *“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.”* Notice carefully the last five words of verse 26, “this man’s religion is vain.” James is describing a vain religion.

What is vain religion? We see that James gives a two-fold description of vain religion. First we see that he describes it as having:

A. Appearance Without Reality

James says, *“If any man among you seem to be religious.”* This man has an appearance of being religious. He seems to be religious. From all appearances he is a religious man.

This is the kind of person who others would call a “religious man.” The people down at the office would say of him, “If you want to talk about religion, so and so is the person you need to talk to.” The neighbors would say, “So and so always goes to church every Sunday. He is always doing things at his church. He is a very religious man.”

When you look at what James says we see that this man actually thinks he is religious. The word, “seem” means “to think, with the implication being that he seems.” This is a man who thinks he is religious. Yet we see that James says there is a difference in thinking you are religious and actually being religious.

One of the emphases you find in the book of James is that what a person really is will be revealed in their life. As we shall see later in our studies, in 2:14-26, James states that if a person has something on the inside it will be revealed on the outside. He tells us that if there is faith there will be works.

He speaks of a believer's works as the evidence they have been saved.

James states in verse 26 that vain religion likewise reveals itself. Notice that he describes this man as one who, "*bridleth not his tongue.*" He is one who does not keep a tight rein on his mouth.

Jesus stated in Matthew 12:34 that the mouth is a tattletale on the heart. He said, "*O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.*"

Jesus said that what came out of the mouth revealed what was in the heart. He was saying that our words reveal what we really are.

I heard about one woman that was known for gossiping that came to the altar and told her pastor that she wanted to lay her tongue on the altar. He said to her, "Sister, this altar bench is about 12 feet long. Lay as much of it as you can on it."

James describes a man that thinks he is religious and has the appearance of being religious, but what he says reveals otherwise. He is one that is constantly talking about others and putting people down. James says that his unbridled tongue reveals that his religion is vain. He may appear to be one thing, but he is lacking in reality. He is not what he appears to be and his tongue gives evidence of that.

A person can come to Church on Sunday, dressed up in their Sunday going to meeting duds, with a pious look on their face, and not be religious. If you really want to know what a person is like, don't measure them by what you see on Sunday. Check them out on Monday if you really want to know about their religion.

In the case of the man in verse 26, he has the appearance of being religious and even thinks he is religious, but the evidence is against him. He thinks he is religious but in reality is far from the ideal.

Also notice that James not only speaks of vain religion as having appearance without reality, but also of having:

B. Activity Without Results

In verse 26 we see that this man "*deceiveth his own heart,*" and, "*this man's religion is vain.*" The word "deceiveth" as used here actually means, "to cheat." The word "vain" means, "without results."

We saw in our last study that in verse 25 that James stated one who is a doer of the word "*shall be blessed in his deed.*" Real religion results in

blessings, but vain religion cheats a person out of those blessings. Vain religion is one in which there are no spiritual results or blessings.

A person can put on the appearance that they are religious, but mere appearance never results in spiritual blessings.

The honor code for the U.S. Military Academy at West Point is as follows: “A cadet does not lie, cheat, or steal; nor tolerate anyone who does.” This honor code is so stringent that even one violation at any time during the four years of study, including even the day before graduation, requires automatic expulsion of the guilty party.

Real religion does not lie, cheat, or steal. But in the case of vain religion there is cheating. It is a violation of God’s code and results in expulsion from God’s blessings.

Secondly, notice that James not only speaks of vain religion but also of:

2. VIRTUOUS RELIGION!

We read in verse 27, *“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”*

In verse 26 we see what man thinks about his religion. In verse 27 we see what God thinks about a mans religion. James describes a religion that is pure and undefiled *“before God and the Father.”* He is talking about a religion that is acceptable to God.

This kind of religion is called “pure” religion. The word “pure” speaks of that which is clean and refers to our motives. He also describes this kind of religion as being “undefiled.” The word “undefiled” means to be, “without stain.”

Just as vain religion manifests itself, so does virtuous religion. James speaks of two ways that this kind of religion manifests itself. First we see that this religion is:

A. One Of Practical Service

In verse 26 we see that the motive is self-centered. He thinks of himself. But in verse 27 we see that virtuous religion is pure. The motive is not self-centered, but others is the focus. In verse 26 we find one hurting others, but in verse 27 we find one helping others.

James says that pure religion is this: *“To visit the fatherless and widows*

in their affliction.” As I mentioned earlier, religion involves service. In this statement, we see the service of true religion.

James speaks service to orphans and widows. James is not limiting service to this class, but points out a certain class of people with specific and special needs. In the Bible days, there were many orphans and widows, and as you can imagine they had many needs.

The word “visit” speaks of more than just dropping by for a visit and saying hello. The word means, “to care, to exercise oversight, to help.” The verb in our text comes from a noun that gives us the word “Bishop,” one that is an overseer. The thought is found in 1 Peter 5:2 when the bishop or pastor is told to, *“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof...”*

The word “affliction” speaks of the pressure that comes from one’s circumstances. James is talking about caring for others, reaching out to others, and helping others during the difficult times of their life. It speaks of watching out for them, looking after them, and to seeing that their needs are met. Again, vain religion thinks of themselves, but virtuous religion thinks of others.

As we noticed in verse 26, vain religion cheats a person out of blessings, but virtuous religion results in blessings.

I think of a story that I read in a couple of commentaries I have been reading on James. A preacher preached on Sunday about heaven and the next day he met a wealthy member of his church. The member said to him, “Pastor, that was a great message you preached on heaven, but you didn’t tell us where heaven is.” “Ah,” said the pastor. “I am glad of the opportunity this morning. I have just returned from the hilltop up yonder. In that cottage there is a member of our church. She is a widow with two little children. She is sick in one bed and the two children are sick in the other bed. She doesn’t have anything in the house—no coal, no bread, no meat, and no milk. If you will buy a few groceries, then go up there yourself and say, ‘My sister, I have brought these provisions in the name of the Lord Jesus.’ Then ask for a Bible and read Psalm 23, and then go down on your knees and pray—and if you don’t see heaven before you get through, I’ll pay the bill.” The next day he saw the church member and he said, “Pastor, I saw heaven and spent fifteen minutes there as sure as you are listening.”

If you have ever cared for others and reached out to help them, then you know what the fellow was talking about.

In one of my pastorates { in North Georgia } there was a man in the local town who owned a clothing store. Every year as Christmas drew near, he would contact several of the pastors – only those with whom he felt comfortable and trusted – and he would ask for the sizes etc of any children that they knew of who were in need of clothes. For every child submitted, he would put together packages which consisted for boys of three pair of pants, four shirts, four sets of underwear, two pairs of shoes, two coats and any other items that he was aware of that they would be in need of. He put together comparable packages of clothing etc for girls as well. He would then give to the pastors a certain amount of money for each child that was to be used for food first and then toys etc.

At another church in the Griffin area, there was a man there who would come to my home about a month before Christmas and always gave me at least \$ 200 that was to be used to help some family during the Christmas season.

Both of these men had only one request – their name was to remain unknown to anyone. They did not desire recognition of any kind for their giving. Both men were blessed beyond measure for their generosity in helping others.

At a second church in the Griffin area a man owned a local grocery store in the community and he was constantly contributing large amounts of groceries that could be distributed to families in need. He asked that I not reveal where the food came from.

There are no blessings to a vain religion, but a virtuous religion, one that serves others, will be rich with blessings. Secondly notice that James speaks of this virtuous religion as:

B. One Of Personal Separation

It is not only a pure religion, one in which others are the motive, but it is also “undefiled.” James says in verse 27 that an undefiled religion is one in which a person *“keeps himself unspotted from the world.”*

The word “unspotted” has the same basic meaning as the word “undefiled” and means, “to be without blemish.” The world speaks of a system that is opposed to God and going in an opposite direction.

In verse 26 we see ones life spoiled and stained by an unbridled tongue, but in verse 27 we see one that is unspotted by the world. James is telling us that virtuous religion involves personal separation.

I think of Romans 12:2 and the words, “*And be not conformed to this world...*” One writer translated the words, “Don’t let the world squeeze you into its mold.” Both Paul and James are saying, “Don’t let the world influence you or shape the way you live or think.”

James describes one that appears to be religious and one that is actually religious. What kind of religion do you have?

10 ANYBODY & EVERYBODY IS SOMEBODY
James 2:1-13

In His autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi wrote that during his student days he read the Gospels seriously and considered becoming a Christian. He believed that in the teachings of Jesus he could find the solution to the caste system that was dividing the people of India. So one Sunday he decided to attend services at a nearby Church and talk to the minister about becoming a Christian. However, when he entered the sanctuary, the usher refused to give him a seat and suggested that he go worship with his own people. Gandhi left the Church and never returned. He wrote, "If Christians have caste differences also, I might as well remain a Hindu." (*Our Daily Bread, March 6, 1994*)

When we come to James 2:1-13, we find that the subject of discrimination is addressed. You find in verse 1 the phrase, "*respect of persons.*" In verse 3 you see the phrase, "*And ye have respect to him,*" and in verse 9, "*But if ye have respect to persons.*" As well, you have the phrase, "*Are ye not partial in yourselves*" in verse 4. These phrases speak of showing favoritism and being discriminatory.

When we think of discrimination we usually think of racial discrimination. The subject of racial discrimination is one that touches practically every page of history and embraces practically every nation of the world. Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama; George Wallace blocking the entrance of the University of Alabama to black students; the student sit-in at a Woolworth's diner in Greensboro, N.C.; the murder of three students in Mississippi; the marches of Martin Luther King all find their roots in the fight against racial discrimination in America. Racial discrimination is still a hot subject in America. Today, the terms "hate crimes" and "racial profiling" has become a part of the American vocabulary.

Possibly the group that is the greatest victims of discrimination in America is Christians. Anti-Christian bigotry is accelerating at a rapid pace in this country. It has come to the place where anyone and anything can have a voice in America except the Christian.

There is an organization called Lambda that advertises itself as a non-profit, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender agency with the mission, "to create social change and achieve full civil rights, dignity, and self-respect for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered individuals through

education, youth advocacy, anti-violence efforts, and fighting discrimination of all forms, to achieve full participation in society of persons belonging to a sexual minority.”

This is not a popular concept, but I want to say that there is nothing dignified or self-respecting about a lifestyle that is immoral, sinful and clearly condemned by the Word of God. When I make that statement I am not being homophobic or discriminatory. I am simply being Biblical.

Groups like Lambda can promote their agenda, champion their cause, and have a voice in public life and woe be to the one that challenges them. However, if you are a Christian you are told that you must divorce your faith from all public life.

There was a case in New York that involved a first grade teacher that refused to allow a six-year old student from reading a Bible story to his class. The mother of the first-grader sued the school and a New Jersey federal district judge ruled in the schools favor. The mother appealed on the ground that the boy’s rights to the free exercise of religion and free speech and been violated and the Third Circuit Court of Appeals rejected the argument, noting that public schools should have discretion “regarding what subjects are appropriate for elementary school classroom discussions.” In other words, a Bible story is inappropriate for elementary school children.

And what is so tragic is that this anti-Christian bigotry is all done in the name of the constitution and the separation of Church and State. Discrimination in this country is not just a racial issue. It is also a religious issue.

In case before us in the book of James, it is not Christians that are being discriminated, but the ones that are being discriminatory. Let’s notice what James has to say about discrimination. First we see that:

1. Discrimination Is A Dishonor To Our Faith!

We read in verse 1, *“My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.”* James tells us that discrimination on the part of a Christian is a contradiction and a dishonor to our faith. When he speaks of faith he is speaking of the relationship we have with the Lord Jesus because we have put our faith in Him as Saviour. Why is discrimination a dishonor to our faith? Notice first of all because of:

A. Who We Are

1. He calls us *“brethren.”* When we were saved we became a part of God’s family. As believers, we are brothers and sisters in the Lord. The Bible often speaks of saved people as children of God, which implies that we are brethren (spiritual brothers and sisters). Regardless of our race, skin color, occupations, vocations, or backgrounds, we are brothers and sisters in Christ.

In the 1800’s, a German anthropologist, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, divided the human species into five races: Caucasian (European), Mongolian (East Asians), Malayan (Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders), Ethiopians (sub-Saharan Africans), and Americans (Native Americans).

However, when God looks at His children He does not see Caucasian, Mongolian, Malayan, Ethiopians, and Americans. He sees us as His children. He sees us as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Unfortunately, people tend to look at people based on their race or the color of their skin. But God does not see black or white, red or yellow. He sees us as a redeemed people that comprise a spiritual family.

When we consider the fact that we are brethren, discrimination of the part of any Christian is a dishonor to our faith. Secondly, we see:

B. Whose We Are

We belong to the, *“Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.”* We belong to the glorious one, the Lord Jesus Christ. When you think of Jesus you think of one that showed no favoritism or discrimination. You think of one that loved the whole world. He died for all men, regardless of who they were or what they had done.

The Bible often speaks of a lack of favoritism or discrimination on the part of God. We read:

Romans 2:11, *“For there is no respect of persons with God.”*

Acts 10:34, *“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:”*

Ephesians 6:9, *“And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.”*

Thank God He is no respecter of persons. If God had shown favoritism, there are some of us that I am sure would have been left out of His offer of salvation. If Jesus had been discriminatory, He would not have died for the sins of the whole world. I am part of God's family because God is no respecter of persons.

God loves the world—all colors, all conditions, all circumstances, all climes, all castes, and all classes. He does not discriminate. When you consider the fact that we belong to One who never showed favoritism or discrimination, it is a dishonor to our faith when we are discriminatory.

Secondly, notice that:

2. Discrimination Is A Disgrace To Our Fellowship!

Beginning in verse 2, James takes us into a Church service. We find the word "assembly" which indicates that what he is about to say involves discrimination being found in the Church. At the very beginning let me say, there is one place discrimination should never be found and that is in the Church.

David Jeremiah in his book on James tells a story about a Sunday morning in the Bel Aire Presbyterian Church where Ronald Reagan and Nancy attended Church when he was governor of California. When in attendance, the Reagan's usually sat in the same seats just off the center aisle about two-thirds of the way into the sanctuary. On this particular morning the governor and his wife were late and by the time they got there, two college students were sitting in those seats. An usher came down the aisle and asked the students if they would take different seats. They moved, and the Reagan's were brought in and seated. The pastor of the church, got up and left the platform, walked down and over to the college students and said, "As long as I am pastor of this Church, that will never happen to you again."

I applaud that pastor because I don't care if it is the president of the United States; the church is not a place to show favoritism or discrimination. In the church, anybody and everybody should be somebody.

Rick Warren said that there are at least five areas where we as believers can be tempted to discriminate:

We can discriminate on the basis of *appearance*.

We can discriminate on the basis of *ancestry*.

We can discriminate on the basis of *age*.

We can discriminate on the basis of *achievement*.

We can discriminate on the basis of *affluence*.

In the case before us in James, the church discriminated on the basis of appearance and affluence. Notice with me:

A. A Illustration Of The Practice Of Discrimination

In verses 2-3 James describes the discrimination in this church was showing. We read, “*For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool.*”

James describes two different people that came into the church. He seems to suggest that they were visitors to their services. One was dressed in fine clothing and jewelry. The other was dressed in shabby clothes. The one that was dressed in fine clothes and jewelry was give the royal treatment. He was ushered to the best seat in the building. Yet, the visitor dressed in shabby clothing wasn’t even offered a seat, but was told to stand or sit in the floor.

Guy King titles his chapter on this passage, “The Short-Sighted Usher.” It was simply a case of showing favoritism to one and being discriminatory to the other based on how appearance and affluence.

4. Notice secondly:

B. A Condemnation Of The Presence Of Discrimination

What does James say about how they treated one above the other? He says in verse 4, “*Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?*” He condemns their partiality and discrimination.

First he condemns how they treated the one as somebody. They gave the one visitor the royal treatment just because he was dressed in nice clothes and wore expensive rings. He had the appearance of affluence and they treated him as such.

Furthermore, he condemns how they treated the other as nobody. The fellow that came in wearing shabby clothes was treated as if he was

nobody. Instead of offering him a seat they told him to stand and if he wanted to sit down, he could sit in the floor. They treated him as a nobody simply because of his appearance.

James says they had *“become judges of evil thoughts.”* The word “thoughts” speaks of motives. Maybe they thought, “We are in a building program and if we treat this fellow right, he may drop a nice check in the offering plate.” When they saw the other shabby dressed fellow, they saw one that could not help them. It may have been a case where they did not care if his kind came to their church. Whatever the case, their motives were wrong.

If a judge that sits on a bench allows what a defendant looks like or dresses like affect his decision, it would be a terrible injustice to justice. To render a verdict in favor of the defendant just because they are rich, popular, or affluent would be a verdict rendered with the wrong motive. James says, “You have become like a judge that renders a decision based on appearance and affluence.”

After condemning their discrimination, James reminds them in verse 5, *“Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?”* They treated the poor with disrespect, but James tells them that God has special interest and blessings for the poor.

Throughout the Bible, we see that God shows special concern to those that are poor. In the Old Testament, God made special provisions for the poor when it came to the sacrifices. If a person could not afford to bring a bullock, goat, or sheep, they good offer a turtledove or pigeon. God made it possible that even the poor could offer a sacrifice.

Also, every seventh year all debts would be cancelled in order to help the poor. When the fields were harvested, the corners of the field were to be left so the poor could glean food for themselves. The poor were never to be charged interest on a loan. If they had to sell their property, a kinsman was to redeem it for them. God established certain provisions and protections for the poor.

When it came to their faith, they may be poor materially and financially, but they were rich spiritually. They were rich in faith and were heirs of the kingdom of God. God did not favor the poor over the rich nor love the poor more than the rich, but He did look on their circumstances with great

interest and care.

James says in verse 6, *“But ye have despised the poor.”* The word “despised” speaks of how they dishonored and mistreated the poor. James says, “You have mistreated and acted discriminatory toward the very people God treats with special blessings.” He was showing them how disgraceful was their discrimination.

He adds in verse 6 and 7, *“Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?”* James asks, “Is it not the rich that oppress you?” The word “oppress” mean’s to tyrannize, to exercise inordinate power over others. James reminds them that the very people they are showing favoritism to is the very class of people that had been running roughshod over them. He says, “The very class of people they are catering to is the very class that is dragging you into courts to sue you of what you have. On top of that, they are the ones that depreciate your faith and blaspheme the name of your Saviour, by which you are called.” They very class of people they were showing favoritism was the class that was abusing them.

Finally we see that:

3. Discrimination Is A Disservice To Our Future!

For a moment skip down to verse 12, *“So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.”* James reminds them that one day they will be judged. He reminds them that one day the Lord will judge them. He reminds them that one day the Lord will judge discrimination.

The fact that discrimination will one day be judged of the Lord makes us look at discrimination in a different light. Someone might say, “Well, I can’t help but feel the way I do for it’s the way I grew up. Where I grew up, everybody felt that way.” My answer to that would be that it may have been what you grew up in but you better grow out of it. Why? Notice:

A. The Sinfulness Of Discrimination

We read in verse 8, *“If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well.”* James calls the command to love your neighbor as yourself the royal law. He no doubt called it that based on what Jesus had said.

In Matthew 22, a Pharisee, had asked Jesus the question, “Master,

which is the greatest commandment in the law” (Mt. 22:36). The purpose of the question was to trip Jesus up, but the answer He gave is classic: *“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”* (Mt. 22:37-38).

What Jesus did in that answer was give a summary of the Ten Commandments. The first four of Ten Commandments are covered in the statement, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.” If a man loves the Lord in such a way he will not put any other gods before him, he will not worship idols, misuse the name of the Lord and will keep the Sabbath holy.

The rest of the commandments are summarized in the statement, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” If a man loves his neighbor as himself, he will honor his father and mother. He will not commit murder or steal. He will not commit adultery or give false testimony against his neighbor and will not covet what his neighbor has.

James says if a person will love his neighbor as himself, that is treat him with respect and without favoritism, he does well. But if not, we read in verse 9 *“But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.”* Shooting straight from the hip, James says discrimination is a sin. It is a violation of God’s Royal law.

In case someone might say, “Well, I know I should not feel this way about others, but it is not as bad as some sins I could be guilty of,” James says in verses 10-11, *“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.”*

All sins are not in the same category and have the same magnitude, but if you break one law, any law, you still are guilty of breaking the law and have sinned. Just because you don’t break certain laws doesn’t excuse you when you break others. Whatever law you break is sin. Since the Royal Law of loving your neighbor as yourself covers all the Commandments that relate to our relationship with others, to break one is to break them all. It is sin!

Since we know that God will not condone sin, then secondly you

consider:

B. The Seriousness Of Discrimination

Again I bring you back to verse 12, *“So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.”* One day God will judge our sins. James says we need to speak and act as people that one day will face God with what we say and how we behave. This makes discrimination a very serious matter.

In fact, notice verse 13, *“For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.”* James says that if we do not show mercy, we will be shown no mercy. But if we show mercy, mercy will triumph or we will be able to rejoice in the Day of Judgment.

How does discrimination affect our future? It will not cause us to lose our salvation but it will affect our reward and what our reaction will be when we stand before the Lord.

To sum it all up, there is no place for discrimination in either our personal lives or our churches. It should not matter to us who a person is, where they are from, or what they have. For the Christian and for the Church, anybody and everybody should be treated as somebody.

Someone once said that salvation is like the measles. If you have it, it will pop out on you. If I may put it this way, in the verses before us James speaks of salvation popping out on the believer. We find that James describes a salvation that is manifested in our life through works.

As we look at the text we see that James speaks of a real faith and a revealed faith. He speaks of a false faith and a fruitless faith. He speaks of the difference between a profession and a possession. He speaks of one that says he has faith and one that shows he has faith.

The subject of verses 14-26 is faith and works. In these 13 verses James speaks of faith and works 13 times. As we look at the text we see what the absence of works indicates and what the presence of works illustrates.

This is a section of scripture that has often been misunderstood. Because of the section we are considering, Martin Luther rejected the book of James calling it a "right strawy epistle." Luther, the great promoter of salvation by faith and by faith alone, felt the section before us taught that man was saved by faith and works. I do not consider myself to be in a class with Martin Luther and feel very inadequate to criticize him in any way, but Luther simply misunderstood what James was saying. In fact, Luther believed and taught the very thing that James is saying.

I quote Luther: "Yea, it is impossible to separate works from faith, as impossible to separate burning and shining from fire." Luther did not believe that works could save a man, but he did believe that there would be works in the life of a saved person. That is exactly what James is saying. James is not saying that works is the path and prerequisite to salvation, but rather the proof and product of salvation. To put it another way, if a person is saved, like the measles, it will pop out on them.

Let's examine this section and consider what James had to say about faith and works. First notice with me:

1. A Faith That Is Professed Without Works!

In verse 14 we find a key word to this section. It is the little word "say." We read, "*What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?*" James is describing

someone that says they have faith. We have someone professing to be saved. We have a faith that is professed.

Now I want you to understand that there is a big difference in someone saying they are saved and actually being saved. Just because someone says they are saved does not mean they really are saved. In FAITH we learn to ask a person the question, "In your personal opinion, what do you understand it takes for a person to go to heaven." Many times, if not most of the time, we get what we call a works answer. By that we mean, the person indicates that they are depending on what they do or how they live to get them to heaven. A works answer reveals that they are depending on works of some kind to save them. As we know, a person is not saved because of what they do, but because of what Jesus has done. But, if we had asked them if they were saved they would have replied yes.

George Barna found that most Americans believe that salvation is an outcome to be earned through their good character or behavior. Six out of ten people (57 %) believe that "if a person is generally good, or does enough good things for others during their lives, they will earn a place in heaven."

However, the Bible says in Ephesians 2:8-9, "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*" If you were to ask the 57% of Americans that believe that being good and doing good will earn them a place in heaven if they are saved, they would no doubt answer yes. Yet, the Bible says otherwise. Again, just saying or professing to be saved does not actually mean that a person is saved. You can sleep in a garage but that does not make you a car.

That is the case before us in verse 14. This person says they are saved, yet James declares they are not. As you look at the verse you see that he says he has faith, yet he has no works. There is an absence of works on the part of the one who professes to have faith. As you look at the verse you see that James declares that the absence of works is very revealing. What does the absence of works reveal? First we see that it reveals:

A. The Truth Of Ones Profession

In verse 14 we see two questions being asked. First, What does it

profit a person who says they have faith but no works, and secondly, can faith save him? The great Greek scholar A.T. Robertson says that in the case of both questions, the expected answer is a negative one. The grammatical form of the questions calls for a negative answer.

Is there any profit to a faith without works? The word “profit” speaks of that which is beneficial or is gained. In other words, James is asking what use is it if a person says he has faith and not works. The answer would be nothing.

Can faith save him? In the Greek there is the definite article “that” which means that James is asking, “Can that kind of faith save him?” What kind of faith? It is the kind of faith that has no works. Can that kind of faith save a person? The answer is absolutely not.

James is not telling us that works saves a person, but rather that the absence of works reveals that a person is not saved. Works reveals the truth of ones profession. As John Calvin said, “It is faith alone that justifies, but faith that justifies is never alone.” There will be works in the life of a person that is saved. The absence of works only reveals that a person is not saved.

In verses 15-16 we are given an example of works. We read, *“If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?”*

James describes a needy brother who approaches another professing Christian. The story suggests this person has the ability to help the needy one that asks for help. He is cold and needs a coat. He is hungry and needs food. The words “Depart or go in peace” are the same as saying, “Let God take care of you.” The words “be ye warmed and filled” describe an even more indifferent attitude. They are the same as saying, “Take care of yourself.” He claims to be a Christian but does not act or react as a Christian. It is an illustration of a person that sits on a Church pew smiling on Sunday, claiming to be saved, who has the ability and means of helping someone, yet does not and cares not about their condition.

The story reminds us of what I John 3:17-18 says, *“But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his*

bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.” John says that the lack of compassion and the refusal to help is a good indication that the love of God does not dwell in a person. In other words, it reveals that a person is not saved.

James echoes the conclusion of John in verse 17, *“Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.”* This kind of faith is dead. It is useless. It is a case of faith being alone. Faith alone will save a person, but faith that is alone reveals the truth of ones profession.

Secondly notice that the absence of works not only reveals the truth of ones profession but it also reveals the:

B. The Type Of Ones Profession

Notice verse 19, *“Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.”* The Bible makes the matter of believing a requisite of salvation. For example, the Bible says in John 3:36, *“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”*

I think of the question that was asked by the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:30, *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”* The answer he was given was, *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”* (Acts 16:31). Believing is God’s requirement for salvation.

However, the Bible speaks of different kinds of believing. James gives us one such example. He tells us the devils (demons) believe there is one God. You will not find an atheist among Satan’s demons. They all believe in God. I think of the time when Jesus was confronted with the man of Gadara that was possessed with demons. The demons in him cried out when they saw Jesus, *“And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God?”* (Mark 5:7).

The demons do not doubt the deity of the Lord Jesus. They know there is one God. In fact, James says they even believe and tremble. The word “tremble” speaks of a high degree of terror. The Greeks used the word to describe ones hair standing on end. They believe and are terrified of the Lord.

Yet, even though they believe, they are not saved. Why? Their belief is nothing more than an intellectual belief. They give mental assent to the

fact there is one God, but they do not and have not accepted Him as Lord and Saviour.

One can believe there is one God and still be lost. One can believe all the Bible says about Jesus and still be lost. It is not enough to believe in Him or about Him. To be saved, one must believe on Him. That is, they must trust Him and accept Him as their Saviour.

George Barna found in his surveys that nine out of ten adults (93 per cent) believe that God exists. He also found that nine out ten adults believe that Jesus is a real person and 85 per cent say they believe he was born of a virgin."

As James said, if you believe in God, you do well, but even the demons believe in God. There must be more than intellectual faith or mental assent. There must a personal acceptance of Jesus Christ and a trust in Him and in Him alone for salvation.

Again, James states that this kind of faith, one that is merely a mental assent and has no works is useless. He says in verse 20, *"But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?"* The word "vain" speaks of "foolish or defective." A person is foolish to think that this kind of faith is a saving faith. It is a defective kind of faith.

What is James saying? He is saying that the absence of works reveals the kind of faith a person has. It reveals whether or not it is just a belief in God or a matter of believing on Christ. A faith that is professed without works is a tattletale of the heart. The absence of works shows the absence of salvation.

Secondly, notice not only a faith that is professed without works, but also:

2. A Faith That Is Proven By Works!

We have seen what one says, now notice with me in verse 18 what ones shows. We read, *"Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works."* We saw that in verse 14 that the key is the word "saying." In verse 18, the key word is "show." In verse 18 we see what a person says verses what a person shows.

Notice with me that:

A. Works Is The Evidence Of Our Faith

James imagines someone saying, “You say you have faith and I say that I have works with my faith. Alright, then you show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” To put it another way, he says, “You show me the evidence of your faith and I will show you the evidence of my faith.”

The point that he is driving home is that works are the evidence of our faith. Again, works cannot save us, but works are the evidence that we have been saved. Jesus said in Matthew 7:16-21, “*Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*”

It doesn't get any plainer than that. Jesus said that you can know a true believer by their fruits. A corrupt tree brings forth bad fruit, but a good tree brings forth good fruit. Not everybody that says they are saved are saved or shall enter into the kingdom of God. There will be the evidence that a person is really saved. By their fruits you can know them.

Listen carefully. If a person is saved there is going to be something in their life that reflects what they have and who they know. One of the great effects of salvation is a changed life. When a person gets saved it changes how they live, how they think, and how they feel. A Christian lives differently, thinks differently, and feels differently. It is impossible for the Lord Jesus to live in a person's heart and it not affect that person.

5. Someone has said, "A fly's a fly because he flies, a flea's a flea because he fleas, a bee's a bee because he bees." A Christian is a Christian. His works prove his faith is real. His works stand as evidence that he is saved.

Secondly notice that:

B. Works Is The Exhibition Of Our Faith

Notice carefully in verse 18 that James is not speaking of the matter of showing God our faith but showing others. It is “show me your faith” and “I will show you my faith.” If I were to summarize all that James is saying

in our text in a single statement it would be that a man is justified before God by faith and he is justified before man by works.

I don't have to prove my faith to God. He knows whether or not my faith is real. However, I do have to show my faith to those around me. How do we know that someone is saved? Is it just because they say so or because of what we see in their life? The answer is obvious. The reason we believe someone is saved is because of what we see in their life.

May I say that people know that we are Christian because of our works. How we live speaks to the reality of our faith.

Unfortunately, many Christians hurt the name of Christ by a poor testimony. If I understand what James is saying, many a poor testimonies are due to an empty heart and a dead faith. If a person is saved there will be the evidence and that evidence gives validity to our faith to those around us.

Thirdly and finally we see:

3. A Faith That Is Perfected Through Works!

In verse 22 he states that works perfect our faith. We read, “*Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?*” What did he mean by faith being made perfect by faith? The word “perfect” speaks of that which is being completed. Works is not only the outcome of our faith but also the outgrowth. Through our works our faith reaches its intended goal and purpose. The ultimate goal of saving faith is a righteous life. Through the works of our life that goal is realized and reached in our life.

In the closing verses of chapter two, James gives two illustrations of this truth. First we see:

A. Abraham The Patriarch

Two incidents in the life of Abraham are given. Let's look at them in the reverse order in which James gives them. First we read in verse 23, “*And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.*”

In this illustration James takes us back to Genesis chapter 15 and the moment when Abraham believed God and was declared righteous. In this

example he is justified before God. It was his faith and his faith alone that was imputed unto him for righteousness.

The second incident James refers to is found in verse 21: *“Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?”* The offering of Isaac was not the means or moment but the mark of his justification. His obedience to God only revealed what happened in Genesis 15. In Genesis 15 he was justified before God and in Genesis 22 he was justified before man.

In Genesis 15 he was saved and God began a work in his life. The fruit of that work is seen in Genesis 22. We see a man that had been brought to the place where he would obey God no matter what God asked. We see a faith wrought with work and perfected through works.

The second example we have is that of:

B. Rahab The Prostitute

In one we see a man and in the other a woman. In one we see a Jew and in the other a Gentile. In both we see that their faith was made evident in their works. We read in verse 25, *“Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?”*

In the case of Rahab the reception of the messengers and believing their message was an act of saving faith. Her actions to save them and help them were the evidence of her faith. Through her actions her faith was wrought with works and was made perfect. Her actions were but the outcome and outgrowth of her faith.

James is telling us in verses 14-26, “Don’t tell me about your faith. Show me!” What kind of faith do you have?

The story is told about a man that worked in the produce department of a grocery store. One day a lady asked if she could have a half-a-head of lettuce. He replied, "Half-a-head? Are you serious? God grows full heads and that is how we sell them." The lady said, "You mean that after all the years I've shopped here, you will not sell me half-a-head of lettuce?" The man said, "Look, if you like I'll ask the manager." The lady said she would appreciate that, so the man marched to the front of the store and manager's office.

He said to the manager, "You won't believe this, but there's a lame-brain idiot of a lady that wants to know if she can buy half-a-head of lettuce." About that time he noticed that the lady was standing behind him. Quickly he added, "And this nice lady was wondering if she could buy the other half."

Later that day, the manager said to the man, "That was the best example of thinking on your feet I have ever seen. Where did you learn that?" He replied, "I grew up in Grand Rapids and if you know anything about Grand Rapids, you know that it's known for its great hockey teams and its ugly women." The manager's face flushed and he interrupted, "My wife is from Grand Rapids." Without batting an eye, the man asked, "And which hockey team did she play for?"

I think about a preacher whose doorbell rang and when he looked out the window he saw a certain member, Mrs. Anderson, standing at the door. He said to his wife, "Honey, will you please answer the door. I have had enough of sister Anderson's gossip. I'm going into my study to work on my sermon." About two hours later he shouted from his study, "Honey, has that old bore left yet?" His wife answered, "Yes, dear, she left some time ago, but sister Anderson is here now!"

We are reminded that sometimes what we say can get us into trouble. As we continue our study of the Book of James, we see that James speaks to us about the tongue. We find that he speaks of the trouble our tongue can get us in and the trouble the tongue can cause.

We find that James speaks to us about controlling the tongue. Since the tongue is in a wet place and has a tendency to slip, James devotes a large section of his letter to the subject that is in everyone's mouth—the tongue.

If you recall in our past studies, James has already had something to say

about the tongue. James said in 1:19, “*Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.*” We are to be quick to hear but slow in what we say. He also said in 1:6, “*If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.*” He tells us that the person who does not bridle his tongue, his or her religion is useless.

Also in 2:12 we read, “*So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.*” We are to guard both our walk and talk in light of future judgment.

Now we come to a lengthy discussion of the tongue. Let’s look at these twelve verses and consider what James has to say about the tongue. First we see:

The Revelation Of A Controlled Tongue!

James begins his discussion of the tongue addressing his words to primarily teachers. He says in verse 1, “*My brethren, be not many masters.*” The word “masters” speaks of teachers. Words and speech are important to a teacher. They are the means by which truth is communicated. Therefore it is understandable that when talking about the tongue, James speaks directly to those who use the tongue.

The importance of a proper use of the tongue is conveyed in the words of verse 1, “*knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.*” When James refers to teachers, he is speaking to those who are teachers of God’s Word. The task of teaching God’s Word is a great responsibility, but with it comes a great accountability.

James tells us that teachers are held to a high standard and will face a stricter judgment. The reason being, what they say exerts influence over others. Therefore it is important that a teacher of God’s Word be faithful to the Word, influencing people for the good and not to the bad.

Whereas, his words are addressed primarily to teachers, they are not limited to teachers. He begins verse 2 by saying, “*For in many things we offend all.*” The word, “offend” means to “stumble.” What James is saying is that in many ways all of us stumble. We all stumble and fail the Lord. We stumble and fail the Lord in many ways. By reminding us that we all stumble, he is telling us that what he has to say about the tongue is not limited to teachers, but includes every believer.

As he begins his section dealing with the tongue, he tells us that the

tongue is very revealing. When you go to the doctor he will ask you to stick out your tongue. He can learn certain things by just looking at the tongue. The tongue is very revealing. Justin Martyr said, "By examining the tongue of a patient, physicians find out the diseases of the body. Philosophers find out the diseases of the mind, and Christians find out the diseases of the soul."

In verse 2 James describes a controlled tongue. He speaks of those who "*offend not in word.*" He tells us that the controlled tongue is very revealing. What does the controlled tongue reveal? First we see that it reveals:

A. Spiritual Maturity

We read in verse 2, "*If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.*" The word "perfect" does not speak of being without sin or failure. He has just said that we all stumble. The word speaks of spiritual maturity. He is telling us that our tongue reveals whether we are spiritually mature or not.

Paul called the believers at Corinth spiritual babies (1 Cor. 3:1) They had been saved for a period of time, but had never grown in the Lord. They were still spiritually immature. One of the indications that we are growing in grace is our ability to control the tongue. It is a mark of spiritual growth and maturity.

There are always those who gossip and talk about others. R. G. LeTourneau was for many years an outstanding Christian businessman—heading a company that manufactured large earthmoving equipment. He once remarked, "We used to make a scraper known as 'Model G.' One day somebody asked our salesman what the 'G' stood for. The man, who was pretty quick on the trigger, immediately replied, "I'll tell you. The 'G' stands for gossip because like a talebearer this machine moves a lot of dirt and moves it fast!"

There are those who move a lot of dirt on people and move it fast. If you want to know the lowdown on someone or something, just ask them. They are like the woman who was known for gossiping that came to the altar one Sunday and told the preacher she wanted to lay her tongue on the altar. He said to her, "That will be good. Here's 40 foot of altar. Lay as much of it as you can on the altar."

The Bible says such a person is spiritually immature. A spiritually mature

person does not gossip. They do not go around talking about other people. They have their tongue under control. A controlled tongue reveals one's spiritual maturity. There are people who say speaking in tongues is the mark of spiritual maturity. James tells us that controlling the tongue is the mark of spiritual maturity.

Secondly, we see that the tongue reveals:

B. Spiritual Mastery

James concludes verse 2 by saying that the person who does not offend in word is, *“able also to bridle the whole body.”* This person is not only able to control the tongue but the rest of the body as well.

Someone has said that our bodies can be a wonderful servant but a terrible master. Many people are controlled by what their bodies want and desire. We yield to temptation because we let our bodies (our flesh) rule us. But a mature person makes their body their servant and refuses to allow it to be their master.

For example, its Sunday morning and the clock goes off. The body says, *“Stay in bed.”* If you let the body be your master, you will stay in bed and miss Church. On the other hand, if the body is your servant, you will ignore what the body says, get up, and go to Church. Spiritually immature people let the body tell them what to do. Spiritually mature people tell the body what they want to do.

A controlled tongue not only reveals our spiritual maturity but mastery as well. What does your tongue say about you? Your tongue not only says things about other people, but it also says something about you as well.

The second thing I want you to notice that James says about the tongue is:

The Results Of A Corrupt Tongue!

James is a master at illustrating. An illustration is a window that allows light in on a subject. Beginning in verse 4, James uses several illustrations to shed light on the subject of the tongue. The illustrations that he uses illustrate that the tongue can be used for both good and bad. Notice first that he illustrates:

A. The Beneficial Use Of The Tongue

We read in verses 3- 4, *“Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet*

are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth."

First he uses the illustration of the reins of a horse (Vs.3). You have a big horse, but it is controlled by a small piece of metal in its mouth. By the reins and the bit in the horse's mouth, one controls what the horses does and where it goes.

Secondly he uses the illustration of the rudder of a ship (Vs.4). You have a large sailing vessel that is moved along by the wind, yet the direction of the ship is controlled by a small rudder. The ship can even find itself in fierce winds, yet by the rudder the governor (pilot) can control where he wants the ship to go and bring it to safety.

In each case, the bit is used for the benefit of the rider and the rudder is used for the benefit of the pilot. James says in verse 5, *"Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things."* Likewise, the tongue is a small member but it can be very beneficial.

One can think of many ways in which the tongue is beneficial. Take the teachers James spoke of in verse 1. They can benefit others by what they say and teach. The tongue can be the instrument by which words of love can be spoken to the lonely. It can be an instrument by which words of comfort can be spoken to the brokenhearted. It can be an instrument by which words of encouragement can be spoken to the discouraged. It is the instrument by which words of direction can be given to the confused. Think of the many that have been saved because of the words someone shared with them.

The tongue can be very beneficial, but it also can be very detrimental.

Notice secondly:

B. The Bad Use Of The Tongue

James says in verse 5, *"Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!"* The tongue is a small member, yet like a bit or rudder it can be greatly beneficial, or like a little fire, it can be greatly destructive.

Think of the great Chicago fire of 1871. The fire reportedly began when a cow kicked over a lantern in Mrs. O'Leary's barn. The fire that started in O'Leary's barn turned into one of the most terrible disasters in the history of the United States? The blaze started on a warm, dry Sunday evening, and at first the O'Leary's and their neighbors tried to put it out themselves.

But after about ten minutes had gone by, one of the neighbors finally ran for the nearest alarm box, about three blocks away, and called the fire department. It took several more minutes for the horse-drawn fire equipment to arrive, and by then a swift wind had begun to blow, causing the fire to spread. The damage was unbelievable. More than 300 people lost their lives and 18,000 buildings (worth about \$200 million) were destroyed. One whole section of the city, four miles long and a mile wide, was completely flattened.

A controlled tongue can bring much help but a corrupt tongue can bring much hurt. James illustrates the potential destruction that the tongue can bring in verse 6, *“And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.”*

First he speaks of how the tongue can pollute. He describes the tongue as a fire and a world of iniquity. The usage of the word “world” suggests the vastness and variety of the tongues evil pollution. Whereas the tongue can help in many ways, it can also hurt in many ways. It can be like a world of iniquity. It can be used in many evil and sinful ways.

We have seen how the mature person’s body is controlled; now we see how the immature person’s body is contaminated. James says that the tongue can defile the whole body. The whole of a person’s life can be polluted and defiled by the tongue.

The phrase, *“the course of nature”* is literally, “the wheel of man’s nature.” The wheel was the ancient symbol of the cycle of life. James is telling us the whole cycle of our life can be defiled by an improper use of the tongue.

Furthermore he adds, that the tongue is *“set on fire of hell.”* Hell is a synonym of Satan. Our tongues can become an instrument of the devil. If the devil is using us in anyway, you can be sure that our life is defiled and polluted.

James is telling us the gossiper is a dirty, defiled, and desecrated person. Do you find yourself talking about other people? Do you spread rumors and gossip about others? The Bible says you are polluted. It doesn’t matter how spiritual you act or think you are; a gossiper is a dirty person being used of the devil.

He also speaks of how the tongue can poison. We read in verse 7-8, *“For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the*

sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

James describes how man has been able to tame various animals, but fails to tame his own tongue. He describes the untamed tongue as an “unruly evil.” The word “unruly” speaks of a lack of stability. It is liable to break out at any time and when it does it is full of deadly poison.

The tongue can be like a deadly dose of poison. It only takes a few drops (few words) to destroy someone’s name and reputation. Mountain climbers will tell you that it only takes a whisper to start an avalanche. One word can smear a character and destroy the usefulness of a person’s life.

In 1899 four newspaper reporters from Denver, Colorado met by chance in a Denver railway station. Their names were Al Stevens, Jack Tournay, John Lewis, and Hal Wilshare. They represented the four Denver newspapers: the Post, the Times, the Republican, and the Rocky Mountain News. Each had been sent by their respective newspaper to dig up a story for the Sunday editions. All four were facing empty-handed return trips to their editors.

Al said he was going to make up a story and turn it in. The other three laughed. One suggested they walk over to the Oxford Hotel and have a beer. They did and during their time together, Jack said he liked Al’s idea about faking a story. They all decided to come up with a story that would really get people’s attention. They decided that a story from foreign angles would be harder to verify, so they decided to do a story about China. John said, “Try this one on: Group of American engineers, stopping over in Denver en route to China. The Chinese government is making plans to demolish the Great Wall; our engineers are bidding on the job.”

Harold was a bit skeptical. Why destroy the Great Wall of China? John thought for a moment. “I’ve got it. They are tearing down the ancient boundary to symbolize international goodwill to welcome foreign trade.” By 11:00 P.M. the four reporters had worked the details of their story. After leaving the Oxford Bar they walked over to the Windsor Hotel and signed four fictitious names in the hotel register. They instructed the desk clerk to tell anyone who asked that four New Yorkers had been interviewed by reporters and had left the next morning for California.

The Denver newspapers ran the story. Front page. The Times headline read, “Great Chinese Wall Doomed! Peking Seeks World Trade.” Their

story was picked up and expanded by newspapers throughout the U.S. and then by newspapers abroad. When the Chinese learned the Americans were sending a demolition crew to tear down their national monument they were outraged. Particularly upset, were the members of a secret society, a volatile group of Chinese patriots who were already wary of foreign intervention. Inspired by the story they exploded, rampaged against the foreign embassies in Peking, and slaughtered hundreds of missionaries. In two months, 12,000 troops from six countries joined forces, invaded China with the purpose of protecting their own countrymen. The bloodshed that followed, sparked by a journalistic hoax invented in a Denver barroom, became the white-hot conflagration known as the Boxer Rebellion.

The tongue has the power to destroy. It can help or hurt. It can pollute and poison. Finally notice with me:

The Rebuke Of A Contradictory Tongue!

James closes his discussion of the tongue by describing one who both blesses and blasts with their words. Notice:

A. An Inconsistent Use Of The Tongue

We read in verse 9-10, *“Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing.”* James describes someone blessing God one minute and the next minute they are cursing their brother, which is made after the likeness of God. One minute they are lifting up God and the next minute tearing down others.

A story is told about Winston Churchill and a woman named Lady Astor. They both disliked each other. Because of their social standing, they often found themselves together at various events. On one occasion they were seated next to each other. Lady Astor said to Churchill, “Sir, if you were my husband, I would put poison in your coffee..” Churchill replied, “Lady, if you were my wife, I would gladly drink it.”

On another occasion Lady Astor walked into an elevator that Churchill was on. It was obvious that he had a little too much to drink. Lady Astor said, “Ah hah! You are drunk!” Churchill said, “Yes, and you are ugly.” Then he said, “But tomorrow I’ll be sober and you will still be ugly.”

There can be a little of Churchill and Lady Astor in all us. We can praise God at one moment and then tear someone down the next. But notice what

James has to say about this use of the tongue.

B. An Improper Use Of The Tongue

He says very plainly in verse 10, *“My brethren, these things ought not so to be.”* The words are a strong negative meaning that such use of the tongue should never be true about us.

Once again he uses illustrations to drive home his point. We read in verses 11-12, *“Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh. “*

He asks, “Does a fountain produce both sweet and bitter water at the same time? Does the fig tree produce olives or the vines figs? Does a fountain yield both salt and fresh water? The answer is obviously no. If not, how can the same mouth bless and blast at the same time?

In summary, James is ending up where he started. A mature person controls his or her tongue. They will not bless God one moment and curse someone the next. That would be an improper use of the tongue, a use that is rebuked and condemned by God.

Verse 8, *“But the tongue no man can tame.”* He is not saying the tongue cannot be tamed. He described someone with a tamed tongue in verse 2. What he is saying is that man cannot tame the tongue himself. The Lord must help him tame the tongue. As one grows spiritually, by the help of the Lord, they learn to control their tongue.

O’ How we need to ask God to help us control the tongue!

What is the cause of most, if not all, the fighting and fussing that goes on in Churches? Why do we not have our prayers answered? What keeps us from walking with God and enjoying His fellowship? As we continue our study in the Book of James, we find that the reason many times centers around “lust”. Lust that focuses on our determination to do it our way!

A word that occurs frequently in verses 1-6 of James chapter four is “lust.” He speaks of the “lusts that war in our members” in verse one. He says in verse 2, “Ye lust, and have not.” He speaks of “your lusts” in verse three. Then in verse 5 he speaks of the “spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy.” It is very obvious that the subject of verses 1-6 is our lusts. What does James mean when he talks about lusts?

It is a word that speaks of the gratification of our sensual, natural, and fleshly desires. It describes one in which pleasure is the chief end. One writer spoke of it as an unbridled search for pleasure. It is descriptive of the person that lives for self. They want things to be done the way they want it done. They want things to go the way they want them to go. They only think about what they want and only do things their own way.

What is the fruit of living after our own desires and making pleasure the chief end of life? As we look at verses 1-6 we see three results of this philosophy. We see three outcomes of our lusts. Notice them with me. First we see:

1. THE DIVISION CAUSED BY OUR LUSTS!

We read in verse 1, *“From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?”* James asks a question and then answers his own question. He addresses the matter of Church conflict. Tragically and sadly, it is not unusual to hear of division and dissension in a Church.

I think of a parable that an unknown author has left us. It goes like this:

The wedding guests have gathered in great anticipation; the ceremony to be performed today has long been awaited. The orchestra begins to play an anthem, and the choir rises in proper precision. The bridegroom and his attendants gather in front of the chancel. One little saint, her flowered hat bobbing, leans to her companion and whispers, “Isn’t he handsome?” The response is agreement, “My, yes. The handsomest...” The sound of the

organ rises, a joyous announcement that the bride is coming. Everyone stands and strains to get a proper glimpse of the beauty. Then a horrible gasp explodes from the congregation. This is a bride like no other. In she stumbles. Something terrible has happened! One leg is twisted; she limps pronouncedly. The wedding garment is tattered and muddy; great rents in her dress leave her scarcely modest. Black bruises can be seen welting her bare arms; the bride's nose is bloody. An eye is swollen, yellow and purple in its discoloration. Patches of hair look as if they had actually been pulled from her scalp. Fumbling over the keys, the organist begins again after his shocked pause. The attendants cast their eyes down. The congregation mourns silently. Surely the bridegroom deserved better than this! That handsome prince who has kept himself faithful to his love should find consummation with the most beautiful of women—not this. His bride, the church, has been fighting again.

I have a feeling that the author had been involved in a church fight or two. Conflict and contention in a church is always tragic. The testimony and effectiveness of many a church has been ruined by division and dissension. James speaks of the result and reason for such division and dissension in a church in verse one. First we see:

A. The Course Of Church Conflict

James asks, *“From whence comes wars and fightings among you?”* James speaks of “wars” and “fighting’s.” The two words describe the course of Church conflict. Phillips translates it, “But what about the feuds and struggles that exist among you?”

First consider the word “wars.” The word means, “to carry on a campaign.” It indicates chronic, long-lasting hostilities. It speaks of a prolonged problem of division and dissension. This is more than a business-meeting getting out of hand. This is a church fight that stretches into weeks, months, and even years.

Then he speaks of “fighting’s.” This particular word speaks of, “a sharp outburst, or skirmish.” The word “war” would speak of a war that last for several years, whereas, the word “fighting” would speak of particular battles that occur during that war.

When there is division and dissension in a church, there are usually outbreaks of that division. Business meetings turn into arguing and people yelling at one another. Church services become everything and anything

but worship.

In Chuck Colson's book *The Body* there is a chapter entitled "Extending the Right Fist of Fellowship." He tells about an incident that occurred at the Emmanuel Baptist Church of Newton, Massachusetts. Listen to his description of what happened:

It was the right hook that got him. Pastor Waite might have stood in front of the Communion table trading punches with head deacon Ray Bryson all morning, had not Ray's fist caught him on the chin two minutes and fifteen seconds into the fight. Waite went down for the count at the altar where most members of Emmanuel Baptist Church had first declared their commitment to Christ... Within an instant the majority of the congregation converged on the Communion table, punching or shoving... The melee soon spilled over to an open space beside the organ... Mary Dahl, the director of Dorcas Society, threw a hymnal... the missile sailed high and wide and splashed down in the baptistery behind the choir. When Ray's right hook finally took the pastor down, someone grabbed the spring flower arrangement from the altar and threw it high in the air in Ray's direction. Water sprinkled everyone in the first two rows on the right side, and a visiting Presbyterian experienced complete immersion when the vase shattered against the wall next to his seat... The fight ended when the police arrived on the scene.

This is the course of division and dissension. When there is a war going on, there will be skirmishes and battles that will break out. Why do such things happen in church and among God's people? What is the cause of such division? Notice secondly that James describes:

B. The Source Of Church Conflict

James asks where these wars and fighting's come from and then answers his own question by saying, "*come they not hence, even of your own lusts that war in your members?*" James tells us that the source of Church conflict is our own lusts. In other words, church conflict is the result of someone wanting to have it his or her own way.

It is like the fellow who no matter what was discussed in a business meeting always got up and said, "I'm against it." On one occasion someone offered to donate the church a chandelier. As usual, he got up and said, "I'm against it." The pastor looked at him and said, "Why would you be against it. It is not costing us anything." He replied, "Well, first of all we

don't have anybody that can play it. Second of all, where would we put it, and thirdly, what we need around here is more light."

The root of most church conflict is that somebody could not have his or her way. They did not get what they wanted or what happened was not what they liked. It all stems from their lusts, their desires, their wants; desires that are selfish and self-centered, rather than God-centered.

We all have our likes and dislikes. We all have our opinions and ideas of how things should be done. We all have our wants and wishes. Yet, when it comes to the church, the issue is not what we want, like, or think, but what is beneficial and best for the church as a whole, and first and foremost what God wants.

Yet, a person that has the problem of lawless lust could care less what is beneficial to others and for the whole. They only care about what they want or desire. Furthermore, they have little thought or concern for what God wants. You can put this in your pipe and smoke it. Church conflict always finds its source in the lusts of our members. It is our pleasure that is the chief end, not necessarily what pleases God or is according to His will.

Remember how chapter three closed. James told us that, "*the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace*" (James 3:18). Who is he talking about? He is talking about a wise man. Who is a wise man? If you remember in our last study, we saw in James 3:2 that a wise man is a perfect man, a spiritually mature person.

A spiritually mature person does not live after his or her own desires. They do not live by the wisdom of this world. They live by an altogether different standard. They don't cause trouble. They sow peace instead of strife.

Secondly, notice not only the division our lusts cause, but also:

2. THE DEPRIVATION CAUSED BY OUR LUSTS!

James begins verse two by saying, "*Ye lust, and have not: ye kill and desire to have, and cannot obtain.*" Living according to the lawless lust philosophy not only creates division, but it also costs us certain blessings.

When James spoke of killing, he was speaking of the extremes a person can go to in order to get what they want. Yet, James reminds us that those who seek their own pleasure are going down a path that will end in frustration. They will have not and will not obtain.

How does our lusts deprive us? What does it deprive us of? Notice two things that James mentions. First he speaks of:

A. Unoffered Prayer

James says in verse 2, *“Ye have not, because ye ask not.”* I must confess that this statement by James is personally one of the most haunting verses in the Bible. It tells me that much of what I can have, I don’t have because I haven’t asked for it. Whenever I read this statement it always jumps out and grabs me by the heart saying, “Look at all you are missing because you don’t pray.”

It is indeed a convicting verse. However, it is spoken primarily to those who have the lawless lust philosophy. The implication is that those who live for self are usually people who rarely seek things from God.

People who live for their lusts are people who try to make things happen themselves. They are usually people that have no desire to pray, and furthermore, they don’t pray because they know that what they want would be contrary to what God wants.

When a person lives after their own lusts, prayer is of little concern to them, so they do not pray. Because they ask not, they have not. They are deprived of the blessings prayer could bring them.

We not only see unoffered prayer, but we also see:

B. Unanswered Prayer

We read in verse 3, *“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your own lusts.”* In verse 2 prayer is not being offered. There is no asking. But in verse 3 we see someone asking but not getting an answer to their prayers. The reason is their own lusts are involved.

Because their lusts are involved they ask “amiss.” The word speaks of praying with the wrong motives. What is wrong with the motive in prayer is that, *“ye may consume it upon your own lusts.”*

The word “consume” means to spend or squander. What a person asks for is not for God’s glory, but to squander upon themselves. I remind you that prayer is never for the purpose of getting our will done in heaven, but for the purpose of getting God’s will done on earth.

Let me give you an example of praying with the wrong motive. Let’s take a Christian wife that has a husband that is unsaved. He is hard to live with,

getting drunk, wasting money on his habit, and when he gets drunk he comes home and mistreats her and the children.

The wife is praying for his salvation. Only what she is really praying for is relief from the miserable conditions in which she lives. She wants him to be saved so he will quit getting drunk. She wants him to be saved so he will quit beating her and the children. She wants him to be saved so things will be better around the house.

Wanting such things is not wrong, but in reality what she is praying for is based on her own desires. She is not praying for his salvation based on his benefit or the glory of God, but for her benefit. She is praying amiss and seeking an answer to consume it upon her own lusts. When we pray amiss, with the wrong motives, we deprive ourselves of answers to our prayers. We rob ourselves of the blessings of getting things from God when we pray.

It is said of John Knox that he could get anything from God that he asked. Having read John Knox biography, I am of the conviction that his prayers always had the will of God and the glory of God as the motive. That would explain why he could get what he asked for. He did not ask for himself, but for God and others.

The third and final thing we see is:

3. THE DISPLEASURE CAUSED BY OUR LUSTS!

James tells us that when we live for own pleasures we bring God displeasure. Not only does our lusts cause church conflict and keep us from having an effective prayer life, it also hinders us from enjoying our relationship with God. Notice:

A. The Friendship That God Does Not Approve

We read in verse 4, *“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”* He speaks of a friendship with the world that is having affection for the world. When he speaks of the world he is referring to the evil principles of this world in which we live. He is speaking of a system of things that is going in the opposite direction of God. It is a system of thing's that does not follow God or honor God.

1 John 2:15 tells us, *“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”* God

plainly condemns a friendship with the world.

Furthermore, James tells us that a friendship with the world always leads to an affair with the world. He uses very strong terms when he speaks of this friendship with the world. He calls this friendship an adulterous relationship.

He says in verse 4, *“Ye adulterers and adulteresses.”* As I said, a friendship with the world always leads to an affair with the world. When we have an affair with this world it is the same as being unfaithful to God.

A husband or wife made each other the vow they would be faithful to each other. As Christians, we cannot love God and love the world at the same time. To love this world is the same as having an affair with this world. It is being unfaithful to God.

Family therapist and psychiatrist Frank Pittman stated, “There may be as many acts of infidelity in our society as there are traffic accidents.” He went on to say that “infidelity is so common it is no longer deviant.”

Sadly and tragically, spiritual infidelity among the Body of Christ is about as common as traffic accidents and is so common that it is no longer considered a sin. Yet, we must never forget that a friendship with the world is spiritual adultery.

Secondly, James speaks of:

B. The Fellowship That God Does Not Allow

James speaks of a friendship with the world as “enmity with God.” The word “enmity” speaks of hostility and hatred. He adds that this enmity or hostility makes an enemy of God. James says, *“whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”*

Instead of being in fellowship with God we are not allowed the privilege of this fellowship. We are like an enemy at war with us. We are not on speaking terms or in fellowship with one another.

One of the blessings and privileges of being saved is having fellowship with God. What a joy to be in fellowship with God! What a delight to walk with Him and talk with Him. Yet, when we live after own lusts, flirt with this world, commit spiritual adultery with this world, fulfilling our lusts, this fellowship is broken.

Russian novelist Lo Tolstoy wrote of a man who was dominated by the driving pleasure for self-gratification. To possess land was his highest

pleasure. Someone promised him that he could own all of the land he could walk around between sunrise and sunset on a given day. He began at a leisurely pace. However, driven by his ambition, he began to accelerate. He drove himself, sprinting faster and faster. His body blazed with fever. He stripped off his shirt and abandoned his boots. As the sun set, he flung himself toward his destination. He reached the starting line as the final rays disappeared in the west. Exhausted, he died. The only land he got was a grave, 6 feet by 2 feet.

Let me sum up what James has been saying. When we live with this lawless lust philosophy, living our own way, doing our own things, living for self and the satisfaction of self, we never gain but always lose.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon has been one of the all time great preachers. Most every preacher has studied, read, and used portions of his sermons and statements at one time or another.

Of all the things I have read about Spurgeon and all the things he said, I don't guess anything gripped my heart any more than one particular statement he made. In one of his sermons he made the statement that he was never out of vital contact with God for more than ten minutes.

In Spurgeon's case, I do not think that was an idle boast. In our case, I think it is a real possibility. It is possible to live in a continual and perpetual contact with God. As believers, we can be close to God and stay close to God.

In our text, James speaks to us about being in vital contact with God and being close to Him. After speaking of a person being an enemy of God, he now speaks of being close to God. After speaking of being a friend of the world, he speaks of being a friend of God.

Would you like to be in vital contact with God? Do you want to be close to the Lord? If so, let's consider verses 5-10 and learn how to be close to the Lord; living under His Lordship.

When we think about being close to God, the first thing we need to understand is:

1. THE CONTROL GOD DESIRES!

A key to being close to God is being controlled by God. This control is sought by God and desired by God. There are no shortcuts to being close to God and it all begins with His control of our life. Notice with me what James says about God's control of our life. We first see:

A. God's Passion For This Control

We read in verse 5, *"Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?"* As we saw in our last study, the word "lust" plays a major part in the thoughts of verses 1-4 of the chapter.

We saw the word as the desires within us to want to do things our own way and to have our own way. It is the desires we have for the things of the flesh and the world.

Now James speaks of how the Holy Spirit that indwells us has a particular lust. The word “lusteth” in verse 5 is a word that speaks of an intense craving and longing. The word describes a deep, passionate, intense yearning by the Holy Spirit that lives within us.

I remind you that God indwells the body of every saved person. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 6:16 that we are the temple of the living God and that God dwell is us and in 1 Corinthians 6:19 he says that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in us. The word “dwell” simply means to reside. God resides in us! Every believer is an earthly dwelling place of God through the person of the Holy Spirit.

James not only speaks of a particular yearning and longing God has, but also of His jealousy. He uses the “envy” in verse 5, a word that speaks of jealousy. We read in Exodus 20:5, *“I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.”*

In our thinking, jealousy mostly has a negative connotation. Yet when used of God and in the case before us in James 4:5, it has a positive connotation. I think the words of John Blanchard in his commentary on James says well what is meant by God’s jealousy:

“It is a jealousy of the divine Lover of His people, the one who loves you with an everlasting love, who was jealous for you the moment you first drew breath upon this earth, who was jealous for you when you were groping for the first hold on life, who was jealous for you when you took those first conscious steps into sin, jealous for you when you first heard His name, jealous for you when you rejected Him, jealous for your salvation as He brought the gospel to you in one way and another, through one person and another, through one means and another, until finally He broke through in the power of the Holy Spirit and brought you to living faith. What is more, He is jealous for you now, jealous for your spiritual welfare, jealous for you in every temptation and trial, jealous lest you should be robbed by covetousness, compromise, worldliness, prayerlessness or disobedience in any shape or form. He is jealous that you should have that fullness of blessing, those riches of grace that He longs to bestow upon every one of you His people.”

When we speak of this jealousy of God we are simply speaking of how God loves us so much that He wants us totally and absolutely for Himself. He deeply longs and yearns to have possession and control of our life.

When the Bible speaks of being filled with the Spirit in Ephesians 5:18, this

control is the thought. To be filled with the Spirit is to be controlled by the Spirit. To be filled with the Spirit is to allow the Holy Spirit to have complete sway of our life.

What an awesome thought, that God has an intense longing to control my life. One of His great passions to have control of my life in order that He can bring me into all that He wants for my life. He does not want part of my life; He wants all my life. He wants more than a place in our life. He wants more than prominence in our life. He wants preeminence!

Furthermore we see:

B. God's Provision For This Control

We read in verse 6, *"But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble."* God not only asks to control our life, but He also provides the resources to be controlled. He gives His grace to enable us to be all He asks and wants.

Someone might say, "I know what God's control of my life will entail. I'm not sure that I can do that or be what God wants me to be." God never asks anything of us that He does not make the provision for accomplishing what He asks. He gives His grace to enable us to do all we should do and be all we should be.

If we are proud, that is, think we can do things on our own and by our own way; this grace will not be made available. We sit ourselves in opposition to God. That is the idea in the words, *"God resisteth the proud."* But if we come to God with a humble heart, a heart that knows it needs help, God will give grace, and even more grace, to be and do all God asks.

It has been well said that where God guides, He provides. He longs to control our life and even gives us grace in order that this control can become a reality in my life.

In our last study we saw that there are several things striving for control of our life. There are our own fleshly desires within us and there is the world that is without us. All want to be the dominant and controlling force in our life. These create a terrific war for the control of our life. They are spiritual enemies that are impossible to defeat on our own. Yet, by God's grace they can be defeated and enable God's control of our life.

When we talk about being close to God we start with the realization that God wants to control our life. Secondly we see:

2. THE COMMITMENT GOD DESERVES!

Since God so passionately longs for the control of our life, then He deserves the control of our life. His desire should be honored with our commitment. We read in verse 7, *“Submit yourselves therefore to God.”*

James is saying that since God yearns to control our life, we should therefore submit ourselves to God. The word “submit” means to “take rank under.” The word was a military term speaking of someone getting into his proper rank. God is the general and we are the privates. We are to submit ourselves to His orders and commands.

There is a story told of how on one occasion someone wrote Emily Post and asked, “What is the correct procedure when one is invited to the White House but has a previous engagement?” She replied, “An invitation to dine at the White House is a command, and it automatically cancels any other engagements.”

When God asks for control of our lives, it cancels out any other plans or desires. It calls for our total commitment and anything short of our commitment is a violation of our rank.

Now, what does this commitment call for in our life? Notice a couple of things we see in our text. First we see:

A. How We Must Stand

We read in verse 7, *“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”* When there is a commitment of our lives to God there will be a stand against the devil.

A story goes, of how during a Church service the devil walked in and marched down to the front of the Church. Everyone started screaming and running for the doors. Soon the building was empty except for one elderly gentleman. He sat calmly in his pew; seemingly oblivious to the fact the ultimate enemy was in his presence. Satan looked at him and said, “Do you know who I am?” The old man replied, “Yep, sure do.” Satan then asked, “Aren’t you afraid of me?” “Nope, sure ain’t,” said the man. The devil then said, “Don’t you know that I could cause you profound, horrifying, physical agony for all eternity?” “Yep,” replied the man. “Then why aren’t you afraid,” asked the devil. The old man calmly replied, “Been married to your sister for over 48 years.”

We may not be married to the devil’s sister, but you can mark it down that

we are in constant battle with him.

The word “resist” is another military term that means, “to take a stand against.” In many cases, we have submitted to the devil and resisted God. Yet, when there is a commitment of our life to God we will take a stand against the devil. He will become our enemy and we will fight any advancement He may make.

Wesley Duell in his book “Might Prevailing Prayer” writes: “While Satan is eager to destroy all families, all nations, and indeed all people, he most hates and opposes those who follow Jesus. He is always antichurch, but most of all anti-evangelism, anti-missions, and anti-prayer.”

May I say he is anti anything that has to do with God in our life. He will do everything and anything in his power to keep us from doing what we ought to do and being what we ought to be.

We must resist the devil in everything and in everyway and there can be no compromise. I think about a hunter that was bear hunting. He came upon this bear, raised his gun, and was about to pull the trigger when the bear said “Is it not better to talk than to shoot? What do you want? Let’s negotiate.” Lowering his rifle, the hunter said, “I want a fur coat.” “Good,” said the bear, “that is a negotiable question. I only want a full stomach, so let us negotiate a compromise.” They sat down to negotiate, and after a while the bear walked away alone. The negotiations had been successful. The bear had a full stomach and the hunter had his fur coat.

When it comes to the devil, shoot first and ask questions later. There is no room for negotiation. To hesitate is the first step in losing the battle.

Notice carefully that James gives us a wonderful promise about our fight with the devil. He tells us that if we will resist the devil he will flee from us. Why do we let the devil defeat us? We do not resist him. How can we defeat the devil? Resist him! The promise is that if we resist him he will run away.

There was a little old lady who never spoke ill of anyone. If she said anything about anybody, it was always good. A friend said to her one day, “I believe you would say something good even about the devil.” “Well,” she said, “you certainly do have to admire his persistence.”

The devil is persistent and will keep coming back. Yet, each time we take a stand against him, he will flee.

Not only in this commitment do we see how we should stand but also:

B. Where We Should Stay

We read in verse 8, *“Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.”* The verb “draw near” describes the way in which the Levitical priests approached God with their sacrifices.

It speaks of getting close to God and coming into His presence. If there is a commitment of our life it will require that we stay close to the Lord. We avail ourselves of every opportunity to be in His presence. In the words of Charles Spurgeon, we will stay in vital contact with God.

Notice carefully that we are given another wonderful promise. James tells us that if we draw nigh to God, He will draw nigh to us. As we seek to get close to God, He will draw close to us. As we seek to be in His presence, He will make His presence real to us.

Someone once asked G. Campbell Morgan how real God was to him and he replied, “As real as the skin on my hands.” We not only can be close to God, but He can be close to us.

Our desire to be close to God and our efforts to be close to God only reveal our commitment. If we want to know anything about the depth of our commitment, look at how much time you spend with the Lord.

Thirdly notice with me:

3. THE CLEANSING GOD DEMANDS!

If we are going to be close to God, sin must never be taken lightly, but always seriously. Sin can never be tolerated in our life. In verses 8-9, James tells us how we must treat our sin. First we see:

A. The Actions We Must Take

We read in verse 8, *“Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded.”* There is to be a cleansing of our hands and a purifying of our hearts.

First, take the matter of dirty hands. The word “cleanse” means, “to wash” and is the word that was used to describe the ceremonial cleansing of the priests. Before they were allowed to offer the sacrifices they washed their hands. The washing of the hands was a figurative act of being cleansed of any sinful acts. “Clean Hands” is still an expression of innocence.

If we are to be close to the Lord we must deal with any sin in our life. Sin

breaks our fellowship with God. 1 John 1:6 makes this clear: *“If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:”*

Secondly, there is the matter of a divided heart. James tells us to purify your hearts, ye double-minded. The word “double-minded” is found only two places in the Bible and that in the book of James (1:8, 4:8). The word means, “two-souled.” It speaks of a person with divided affections. It is like a person trying to hold on to the world with one hand and the things of God with the other. It is like one trying to run with the hare and hunt with the hound at the same time.

The word “purify” simply means, “to sanctify.” Instead of having a divided heart, we are to separate our heart from the world and separate it totally to God. If we are to be close to God we must have a single heart.

We not only see the actions we must take but also:

B. The Attitude We Must Have

We read in verse 9, *“Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.”* In these words we see someone that is deeply moved and concerned about sin in their life.

Notice the three words that James uses to describe the attitude we should have about our sin. First, there is the word “afflicted.” It is translated “wretched” in Romans 7:24 and speaks of an inward feeling of misery. When we sin, it should rip our insides out. It should make us feel dirty and defiled.

Then there is the word “mourn.” This word speaks of the sadness our sin should cause. The word “weep” speaks of an outflow of tears that reveals our sadness and sorrow.

In other words, we should be broken over our sin. Whenever we sin, it should cause deep sorrow and grief in our hearts. That’s why James said, *“let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.”* When we sin we should come to God with a broken and sorrowful heart that we have sinned.

In our day and time, it seems that sin no longer bothers us. That is more an indication of how far we have gotten from the Lord. I have found that the closer you get to God, the more sin will bother you.

Again, if we want to be close to the Lord, we must deal with any and all sin

in our lives. We must deal with sin thoroughly and thoughtfully.

James sums it all up in verse 10, “*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.*” We can live a low life or a lofty life. It all depends on whether we are close to the Lord. How about you? How and where are you living?

It all centers around Lordship Living!

15

James 4:11-12 UNGODLY GOSSIP!

In his commentary on James, John MacArthur tells the story of a happy little family that lived in a small town in North Dakota. Each evening the neighbors saw the husband and father being greeted at the gate by his wife and two small children. When the weather was nice, they would see the father and children playing on the lawn while the mother and wife looked on with a smiling face. Then one day a gossip started the story that the man was being unfaithful to his wife. It was a story entirely without foundation, but it eventually came to the ears of the wife. It was more than she could bear. That night when the husband came home there was no one to meet him at the gate. There was no happy children or smiling wife to greet him when he walked into the house. There were no happy sounds in the house or fragrant aroma coming from the kitchen, only coldness and something that chilled his heart with fear. He found his family, the three of them in the basement hanging from a beam. In despair, reason left its throne and the young mother had taken the lives of her two children and then her own. In the days that followed, the truth of what happened came out. A terrible tragedy caused by a gossip's tongue and an untrue story.

The story reminds us of what gossip and slander can do. One of the major themes of the book of James is the wrong use of the tongue. We have seen in past studies that James has had much to say about the use of the tongue. We saw in chapter 1:19 that James told us to be "slow to speak." In a strong rebuke James said in chapter 1:26, "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his own tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain."

In chapter 2:12 he says, "So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty." In chapter three he devoted a large section to the danger of the tongue and the damage it could cause. He spoke of the tongue as being "set on fire of hell" in 3:6 and as "an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." Once again in chapter 4 he addresses the subject of the tongue and deals specifically with slander, tearing and putting people down with our words.

In Webster's 1828 dictionary, he gave this definition of slander:

"A false tale or report maliciously uttered, and tending to injure the reputation of another by lessening him in the esteem of his fellow

citizens, by exposing him to impeachment and punishment, or by impairing his means of living.”¹

As the years have passed the definition has been toned down considerably. In the 1975 edition of Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary, this definition is given:

“The utterance of false charges or misrepresentations which defame and damage another’s reputation.”

The basic meaning is there but gone is the words “maliciously uttered,” “tending to injure” and “lessening him in the esteem of his fellow citizens.” The condensed and revised definition we have today reminds me that we don’t always view slander the way previous generations may have done so. It is true that there is a law where one can sue for defamation of character, but as a whole, we do not take it very seriously when it comes to talking about people in a way that tears and puts them down.

We Christians are good about clothing slander in respectable garments. We talk negative about others and say things that injure a persons name and character and we do so by saying such things as: “There is something I’m really concerned about,” or “I want to share with you something that I want you to help me pray about,” or “I’m not gossiping, but there is something I think you need to know.”

It is a John Calvin described, “fondly exalting ourselves by lowering others.” We do it in such a way that makes us look like one that is so caring, so concerned, and so spiritual, when all the time it is nothing more than a way of spreading gossip, sharing rumors, and lessening a person in the esteem of another.

As we look at what James had to say about slander, we see that slander is a very serious matter. It matters not what kind of garment we may clothe our slander in, it is a very serious matter in the eyes of God. Let’s notice what James has to say about slander and see the seriousness of it. First we see:

1. A BEHAVIOR IN, THAT WE ARE DISPARAGING!

We read in verse 11, “*Speak not evil one of another, brethren.*” The words, “speak not evil” come from a word that means to slander. It describes someone speaking of another person in a disparaging way with the intention of putting them down. It is a word that describes the spirit of

ever finding fault in others.

We all have known of those who were always tearing people down and always finding fault in others. They are like the fellow I read about, that walked into Joe's Barber Shop for his regular haircut. Joe was known for putting others and things down. As Joe cuts his hair he asks, "What's up?" The man tells him that he is going on a vacation to Rome. Joe said, "ROME? Why would you want to go there? It's a crowded, dirty city full of crazy people." Joe then asked how he was getting there and the man told him he was flying TWA. Joe said, "TWA? That's a terrible airline. Their planes are old, their flight attendants are ugly, and they are always late." Joe then asked where they were staying and the man told him that they were staying at the downtown International Marriott. Joe said, "THAT DUMP? That's the worst hotel in the city! The rooms are small, the service is terrible and they are way overpriced." The man then told him that they were going to the Vatican to see the Pope. Joe said, "SURE? You and a million other people. He'll look the size of an ant." A month later the man came into Joe's Barber Shop for his regular haircut. Joe asked, "How was your trip? I bet TWA gave you the worst flight of your life?" The man answered, "No, it was quite the opposite. Not only were we on time in one of their new planes, it was full and they bumped us up to first class. Everyone was so nice and the service was excellent." Joe said, "Well, I bet the hotel was just like I described?" The man answered, "No, quite the opposite. They had just finished a \$25 million remodeling. It's the finest hotel in Rome now. They were overbooked, so they apologized and gave us the presidential suite at no extra charge." Joe mumbled, "Well, I KNOW you didn't get to see the Pope!" The man answered, "Actually, we were quite lucky. As we were touring the Vatican, a guard tapped me on the shoulder and explained that the Pope likes to personally meet some of the visitors and if I would be so kind to follow him. He led us into this private room and in a few minutes the Pope came in and shook our hand." Joe then said, "WELL, DID he say anything to you?" The man answered, "Oh, not much really. He just asked me where I had got such an awful haircut?"

As I said, we all have met a few Joe's. Notice with me how James describes slander. First we see that slander is:

A. A Divisive Behavior

Notice the emphasis James places upon our relationship as brothers in

the Lord. He says, "Speak not evil one of another, brethren." Also, "He that speaketh evil of his brother and judgeth his brother." Three times in verse 11 he refers to the relationship that believer's have with one another. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. We are a spiritual family.

Slander does not promote harmony and fellowship in the family, but instead hinders and hurts our relationship with one another. The Bible tells us in:

Romans 12:10 "Be kindly affectioned one to another" and "preferring one another."

Romans 15:7, "receive ye one another" / Romans 15:14, "admonish one another" / Galatians 5:13, "serve one another"

Ephesians 4:2, "forgiving one another" / 1 Thessalonians 4:9, "love one another" / 1 Thessalonians 4:18, "comfort one another"

1 Thessalonians 5:11, "edify one another"

All these suggest the effort and aim of developing our relationship as brethren, not dividing. Secondly, the James describes slander as:

B. A Devilish Behavior

In James 2:7 we saw how James stated, "*Resist the devil.*" The word "devil" means, "slanderer, false accuser." In Revelation 12:10, the devil is called the "accuser of the brethren." I don't think any believer would consciously do the work of the devil, but when one slanders, puts people down, and speaks of another person in a disparaging way, they are doing the work of the devil. To put it very simply, when we slander others we are acting like the devil.

Peter used the word translated "devil" twice in 1 Peter to describe how unbelievers talk about believers. We read:

1 Peter 2:12, "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation."

1 Peter 3:16, "Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ."

Peter tells us that when we tear down others we are acting like someone that is unsaved. Or, to put it another way, we are acting like the children of

the devil rather than the children of God.

Someone said: We speak against our brothers and sisters when we complain about them, carry stories that make them look bad, judge their motives, and condemn them. Anything we say that tears them down instead of building them up is speaking against them. And such speech is one of the most common problems among Christians today.”

A problem among Christians today? Yes! Yet, it should be the least of our problems. Why? It is divisive and even worst, devilish. Notice secondly with me, not only a behavior in that we are disparaging but also:

2. A BEHAVIOR IN, THAT WE ARE DEFIANT!

James shows the seriousness of slander by describing it as a defiant behavior on our part. When we talk about others and tear down others it reveals a defiant heart. Let me explain. Notice that slander:

A. Reveals Our Disregard For God’s Commands

We read in verse 11, *“He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law.”* James tells us that when we speak evil of others we are in the same breath speaking evil of the law or the commands of God. He uses the same words that he used to describe how we slander others. He says that the slandering of others is a slandering of the law.

Notice that he not only speaks of slandering other but also judging others. The word “judgeth” means, “to condemn, to call into question.” Now here is one of the things that make slander, talking about others behind their back, tearing them down, so serious. When we do so, we are showing our complete disregard of God’s commandments. In essence we are saying, I am not bound by God’s command. His command does not apply to me. We are in reality condemning what God has said and calling into question His command.

I think you would agree with me, that it is serious business when we question God’s commands, and think that we are not bound by His commands. Yet, that is exactly what we do when we slander others for in doing so we are slandering His law. Furthermore we see that slander:

B. Reveals Our Disobedience Of God’s Commands

No doubt when James spoke of the law he was referring back to what he said in 2:8, *“If ye fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘Thou shalt*

love thy neighbor as thyself,' ye do well." God's command is to love one another, not slander and tear down one another. When we tear down others we are disobeying that command.

James says in verse 11, *"but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge."* James has already spoken to us about being a doer of the word. In 1:22 we read, *"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only."* Now he says that when we slander others, we are not a doer of the word or of God's commands. We are disobeyers instead of doers.

One writer said that when we slander others we commit mutiny in God's kingdom and that we are as guilty of shattering God's law as when Moses broke the tablets at Sinai. Let me put it in very simple words. When we talk about others and tear down others, no matter how we excuse it or justify it, we are in essence saying that God's law does not apply to us and that we are not bound by what God says. We are defiantly and blatantly defying God's command and that my friend is serious business.

Understanding what James says ought to make us think twice before we say anything about something that would be disparaging. The final thing I want you to see about this behavior is that it is:

3. A BEHAVIOR IN, THAT WE ARE DISQUALIFIED!

James not only reminds us of how serious slander is, but reminds us that we lack the qualifications to pass judgment or condemn others. We read in verse 12, *"There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another."* James tells us that:

A. It Is Not Our Role To Judge Others.

James reminds us that there is one Lawgiver. There is no doubt that He is talking about God. He is the one and only Lawgiver. The word "Lawgiver" speaks of one who puts His laws into place." We are not the ones who put the laws into place. We are not responsible for the moral laws that exist in this universe nor the written laws found in God's Word. Neither you nor me is the author of the Bible. God is the one who put the law into the place and He is the author of the Bible. He is one and only Lawgiver, therefore it is not my role to pass judgment on people or to condemn them.

James tells us that God is the only one who is able to *"save and to*

destroy.” God is not only the giver of the law, He is the only one who applies the law as well.

Furthermore, we see that:

B. It Is Not Our Right To Judge

James says in verse 12, “Who art thou that judgest another?” Think with me about this statement for a moment. In the Greek language, one of the ways of putting emphasis on a word is to give it first place in the sentence, when normally it would appear later in the sentence.

In verse 12 the word that is written first is the word “thou.” In other words, when reading the sentence the word “thou” should be stressed. We should read it, “Who art THOU that judgest another?” James is saying, since God is the one and only Lawgiver, who am I to judge another. Who are we to sit in judgment on others? Who are we to talk about others and pass judgment on their life? It is not our role, therefore it is not our right.

In a nutshell, James is asking, “Who made you God?” What right to do we have to talk about others in a negative way? What right do we have to render our opinion about others? We are not God. When we talk about others and tear down others we are acting as if we are God. As one writer said, we are saying, “Move over God, your throne has room for me.”

The next time you are tempted to share a bit of gossip, or give your opinion about someone that is negative, or pass judgment on another, ask yourself, “Who made you God?” Who give you the role or the right to do so? Let me sum all James has said by reminding you of what God says elsewhere in His words. We read in:

Leviticus 19:16, "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the Lord."

Psalm 101:5, "Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off: him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer."

God said in Psalm 50 God speaks of the wicked and the behavior of the wicked. We read in verses 19-20, “Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. [20] Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother’s son.” Slander is a mark of the wicked.

We read in Psalm 15 that God speaks of the godly man and the behavior

of the godly. We read in verse 3, “He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour.” A mark of a godly man is that he does not slander others.

Appomattox, Virginia is where General Lee surrendered to General Grant. On April 9, 1865, General Robert E. Lee put on his finest dress uniform, mounted his horse Traveler, and rode away from his tired and battered troops to Appomattox where he would surrender his army to Grant. Lee fully expected that his men would be herded like cattle into railroad cars and taken to a Union prison and that he, as their general, would be tried and executed as a traitor. In the living room of the home where the vanquished and victor met, Lee asked Grant what his terms of surrender were to be. Grant told Lee that his men were free to take their horses with them and go back to their farms and that Lee was free to go home to begin a new life. Lee offered Grant his sword, but Grant refused it. Lee heaved a sigh; he came expecting to be humiliated, but was able to leave with dignity and honor. As Grant watched Lee mount Traveler, Grant took off his hat and saluted his defeated enemy. General Lee was deeply affected by the act and actions of General Grant. And as long as General Lee lived, he never allowed one critical word about Grant to be spoken in his presence. {Copied from “Turning to Integrity by David Jeremiah }

Understanding what James has said about slander, as believers, we should never allow a single negative word to be spoken in our presence about another. Amen!

16

James 4:13-17 BABY BOOMERS...

Over the past several years certain terminology and descriptions have been added to our vocabulary that distinguishes the generational differences in our society. One popular term that has been used over the past years has been Baby Boomers. And also we hear about Baby Busters.

George Barna once broke down the American population into five existing generations in his book written in 1992. He listed them as:

Seniors: those that were born in 1926 and earlier

Builders: those that were born between 1927 and 1945

Boomers: those that were born between 1946 and 1964

Busters: those born between 1965 and 1983

Those born after 1984 to the present were yet to be named

However we are really dealing with an attitude that has been around for all generations. It is the attitude of being self centered and leaving God out. This is an attitude that has become popular in many concepts of life.

When we talk about Baby Boomers we are talking about the generation that is sometimes called the “war babies”—the 76 million children who were born in the years after World War 1 and the Korean War. They are called Baby Boomers because there was such a boom in births beginning in 1946 compared to the birth figures prior to that time.

When we think about Baby Boomers, or specifically this attitude, we can refer to an article that appeared in *Esquire*, written by Robert George, editorial page writer of the New York Post, entitled, “The Worst Generation.” George wrote: “The Baby Boomers are the most self-centered, self-seeking, self-interested, self absorbed, self-indulgent, self-aggrandizing generation in American history.” Yet this attitude is in no way limited to those born during this period of time. Actually this attitude has flourished in every generation to a certain extent.

Many would agree that this generation has largely lived for themselves. The Baby Boomer generation as a whole may have made its priority what they could be, what they could do, where they could go and what they could get and have; but again it’s not limited to that age group.

When you read James 3:13-17, you would think that he is writing specifically to Baby Boomers. Yet, I am mindful that some of the characteristics of Baby Boomers are true of every generation, even those of James' day.

James speaks to us about how we approach life, how we assess life, and how we analyze life. Notice:

1. A LIFE THAT FORGETS GOD!

In verse 13 James uses as an illustration the attitudes, aspirations and actions of certain merchants in his day. To introduce his illustration he uses a phrase that is found but one other place in the Bible. He says, "Go to now." We might say, "Come now," or "Now look here." It is a phrase that usually implies disapproval and calls for one's complete attention.

As we look at verse 13, it brings to mind two questions:

A. What Are The Goals Of Our Life

As we read verse 13 we see the goals of these merchants. Their goals are expressed in what they were saying: *"Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there for a year, and buy and sell, and get gain."*

David Jeremiah in his book on James describes their plans as a model business plan. What is their plan? They have established a date to initiate their plan—today or tomorrow. They have chosen the site or place to carry out their plan—such and such a city. They have laid out a time frame to accomplish their plan—continue there a year. They have identified and clarified their purpose—to buy and sell and get gain.

Or as Guy King says:

He chooses his time

He selects his spot

He limits his stay

He plans his doings

He reckons his profits²

Here is a couple of merchants making their plans and setting goals for the coming year. Obviously, these merchants are planners, ambitious and have specific objectives in their life. They know what they are doing; know where they are going, and what they want.

Ted Engstrom wrote in his book, *Strategy for Leadership* about why organizations fail or falter. One reason he gives is that planning was inadequate or limited. No one would say that the plans of these merchants were inadequate or limited.

The plans and goals of these merchants raise the question; what are our goals and plans for our life? What are we trying to accomplish in life and with our life? The businessman might ask, "What are my goals for my business?" The college student might ask, "What is my major and how will it equip me for the future?" Another might ask, "What is my career goal? What do I want to be and where do I want to go?" The young couple might ask, "When will we buy our first house?" Others might ask, "What are my financial or retirement goals?"

Again, these merchants raise the question, "What are our goals and plans in life?" But they also raise another question, a very important question.

B. Where Is God In Our Life

As stated earlier, the phrase "Go to now" is usually used when something is disapproved. Is James disapproving the setting of goals or planning in our life? Is he disapproving working and the desire to make money? James is not disapproving their plans. What he is disapproving is that God is nowhere in their plans. James is reminding us of the folly of leaving God out of our plans.

If there is any characteristic or trend of the Baby Boomer generation that is worthy of disapproval, it is this one thing. The Baby Boomer thinks in terms of, "What I am going to do." "What I am going to be." "What I am going to have." It is, "I,I,I," and "me, me, me" with no thoughts of God and what His plans may be. It is much like the merchants who were saying, "We will go."

It is not wrong to plan, but it is wrong to plan without God and considering His plans. It is not wrong to work, make money and have things. Yet it is wrong when things have us, instead of God. God is never to be divorced from who we are or what we do. If God and His plans cannot be a part of who we are then there must be a change in the course of our life. If God and His plans cannot be a part of what we do, then there must be a change in what we do. If God cannot be a part of what our goals and plans are, then our goals and plans need to be rearranged.

God is to have more than a part in our life. He is to be preeminent in our

life. He is to have more than just Sunday in our life. He is to have Monday through Saturday in our life.

What is James saying? He is saying that God is not to be left out of our today or tomorrow. God is not to be left out of whatever city we go into. God is not to be left out in the year ahead. God is not to be left out in our buying, selling, and getting gain. Whatever and whenever, God is to be the major factor in all our plans and goals.

6. As we look further at what James said, we are given a reason why we should not forget God in our life.

2. A LIFE THAT FACES GOD!

While we often think of today and tomorrow, James thinks even further ahead. He thinks of the life that is to come. He evaluates life in the light of eternity and what follows once this life is over.

A. This Life Is Not Predictable

He says in verse 14, *“Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow.”* James is saying that we can make our plans and set our goals, but in reality, we don’t what tomorrow holds or what can happen in the future.

There is nothing wrong with planning and preparing for tomorrow (provided you do not leave God out), yet we never know what curve life may throw us, or what things will happen, or how things may turn out. A person can be sailing calm seas today, but stormy seas tomorrow. There could be not a cloud in the sky today, but tomorrow skies could be dark. Tomorrow is not predictable. Life is not predictable.

B. Life Is Not Permanent

James asks in verse 14, *“For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”* James not only speaks of the uncertainty of life, but also of its brevity. James uses the illustration of the short life span of a mist. The word “vapour” is description of a mist. It is translated “smoke” in Acts 2:19. Like steam coming out of a teakettle on the stove, life at its longest is very brief.

We do not know what tomorrow holds and furthermore, we don’t even know if we will be here tomorrow. That’s why Solomon said in Proverbs 27:1, *“Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”* I plan on being around here tomorrow. I am sure that each of

you has no plans to check out of life today. Yet, we have no guarantee that we have a tomorrow.

Peter Marshall told the Arabic fable of a merchant in Baghdad that sent his servant to the market. When he returned it was obvious that he was deeply disturbed. He said to his master, "Down in the marketplace I was jostled by someone in the crowd. When I turned I saw that it was Death that jostled me. He looked at me and made a threatening gesture. Please lend me a horse that I might hasten to Samarra and hide there so Death cannot find me." The merchant loaned him a horse and the servant galloped away as fast as he could. Later the merchant went to the marketplace and saw Death standing there in the crowd. He walked over to him and said, "Why did you frighten my servant this morning? Why did you make a threatening gesture?" Death replied, "That was not a threatening gesture. I was only startled and surprised. I was astonished to see him in Baghdad for I have an appointment with him tonight in Samarra."

Death has an appointment with each of us and we know not when. Again, we do not know what tomorrow holds and we don't even know if we have a tomorrow. I believe that what James is driving at is that it is folly to leave God out of our life and one day we will have to face God. There is more to life than this life. There is the life to come and in that life we have an appointment to meet God.

Since in the next life we will meet God, then this life ought to be lived with the thought of God.

3. A LIFE THAT FOLLOWS GOD!

Since we will meet God, we ought to live life according to God's purposes and plans for our life. James says in verse 15, "*For that ye ought to say, 'If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.'*"

A. Life That Is According To God's Will

James is telling us that what tomorrow holds is all up to God. He is the one in charge of our tomorrows. He is in charge with what happens and how things turn out. Furthermore, he is telling us that if there is a tomorrow, it is up to God. He is the one not only in control of what happens tomorrow but if we will see another tomorrow.

B. Life That Is Acceptant Of God's Will

Our attitude ought to be, “If the Lord will.”

I think about a story I read about a man who was riding his motorcycle along a country road. He stopped to talk to a preacher in a churchyard. The preacher asked where he was going. He told him that he was going to town to sell his motorcycle. The preacher said, “You ought to say, ‘I’m riding into town to sell my motorcycle if it be the Lord’s will.” The man rolled his eyes, laughed, and roared off toward town. He thought to himself, “Sell my motorcycle if it’s the Lord will? Lord’s will or not, I’m selling my motorcycle.” Later that afternoon the preacher saw the fellow coming down the road stumbling and staggering. His pants were torn exposing skinned knees. His arm was in a sling. His shirt was half torn off his back. His hair was a mess. His elbows and forearms were covered in blood. “What happened?” asked the preacher. The fellow replied, “After I left you I was on my way to town and a big storm came up. I tried to outrun it, but the rain began to fall like lumps of lead. As I was going around a big curve I hit some loose gravel and the motorcycle slid out from under me. I skidded more than a hundred feet on the pavement. I managed to get up, and walked to a nearby farmhouse. As I walked up to the door, a frightened woman pointed a shotgun in my direction. I started running and she started shooting. I ran through the brush and briars and got all scratched up. As I stood there picking buckshot from my backside, lightning struck a tree and it fell on me.” The preacher looked at him and asked, “Where are you going now?” The man replied, “I’m going home...if it be the Lord’s will.”

Since we will meet God one day, we should live according to His will.

James says in verse 16, “*But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.*” Describing these merchants and all those who think like them, James describes them as boasters of what they were going to do. Since we do not know what tomorrow holds or even know if we have a tomorrow, such boasting is foolish, and even evil.

Therefore James says in verse 17, “*Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*” Deferring to do the will of God is equally foolish.

God has a purpose and a definite plan for each of our lives!

17 OUR "UPLOOK" AND "OUTLOOK"

James 5:7-8

A man's car stalled in heavy traffic. He tried and tried but could not get the car restarted. To make matters worse, there was a long line of unsympathetic and impatient drivers behind him honking their horns. He finally got out of his car and walked back to the first driver and said, "I'm sorry, but I can't seem to get my car started. If you'll go up there and give it a try, I'll stay here and blow your horn for you."

If most of us were honest, we would have to admit that patience is a virtue that could use some improvement in our lives. There are not many that could boast that they are patient person.

Many would be like the fellow who prided himself on being exceedingly punctual. He followed a precise routine every morning. His alarm went off at 6:30 A.M. He would jump right out of bed, shower, shave, eat his breakfast, brush his teeth, pick up his briefcase, get into his car, drive to the nearby ferry landing, park his car, ride the ferry across to the downtown business area, get off the ferry, walk straight to his building, march to the elevator, ride to the seventeenth floor, hang up his coat, open his briefcase, spread out his papers, and sit down at his desk at precisely 8:00 A.M. Not 7:59 or 8:01 , but precisely at 8:00 A.M. He followed the same routine without variation for eight years, until one morning his alarm did not go off, and he overslept for ten minutes. When he did awake, he panicked. He rushed through his shower, nicked himself while shaving, gulped down his breakfast, skipped brushing his teeth, grabbed up his briefcase, jumped into his car, sped to the ferry landing, jumped out of his car, and started running toward the ferry. It was then that he saw the ferry was several feet from the dock. He thought to himself, "I think I can make it." He ran down the dock as fast as he could. When he got to the edge of the dock, he jumped and amazingly reached the ferry. He landed with a loud thud on the deck. The Captain ran down to make sure he was all right. Assured that he was okay, the Captain said, "Man, that was a tremendous jump, but if you had waited another minute, we would have reached the dock and you could have walked on."

As we continue looking at the Book of James we come to a section that specifically deals with patience. In verses 7-11 we are given three examples of patience:

(Vs.7) The Patience of the farmer

(Vs. 10) The Patience of the prophets

(Vs. 11) The Patience of Job

In this study, we will consider the patience of the farmer and as we do so we will look at patience as it relates to the Lord's coming. The Lord's coming is presented as a special inducement for patience. Twice in verse 7 and 8 the coming of the Lord is mentioned. In relation to the Lord's coming, twice we are told to be patient. As we look at these two verses let's consider our uplook and how it should affect our outlook. Notice first:

1. THE UPLOOK THAT STIRS THE HEART!

James says in verse 7, *"Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord."* He says in verse 8, *"Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."* From these words let's draw two thoughts about the Lord's coming. First, we see:

A. The Truth Of The Lord's Coming

James tells us that the Lord is coming. He is echoing the great truth found throughout the Bible that one day Jesus Christ will come again. Jesus gave the promise in John 14:3, *"If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again."* We have our Lord's own personal promise that He will come again. Just as sure as He came the first time, He will come the second time.

There are three words in the New Testament that are translated "coming." There is the word *epiphaneia* that describes a manifestation. The Greeks used the word to speak of their gods coming down from Mt. Olympus. The idea is that Jesus will come and manifest Himself in all His glory and majesty.

There is also the word *apokalypsis* from which we get our word apocalypse. It is a word that speaks of an uncovering or revealing. It is the word used for the Book of Revelation that unveils the things that will happen in the future.

Finally, there is the word *parousia* that is the word found in our text. The meaning of the word is "a presence." It is a compound noun coming from

para that means, “along side of, close to” and the verb *eimi* that means, “to be.” Together they mean, “to be alongside of” or “to be present.”

The coming of the Lord means that He is personally coming for the believer and from henceforth, the believer will be in the presence of the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 tells us that when Jesus comes again both the living and the dead shall be caught up and “*so shall we ever be with the Lord.*” The coming of the Lord means that we will be in His presence.

The second truth about the Lord’s coming from our text is:

B. The Time Of Our Lord’s Coming

We read in verse 8, “*the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*” A similar expression is found in Philippians 4:5. “Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand,” and in Revelation 1:3, “*Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.*”

The idea is more than the Lord’s coming is near, but is imminent. His coming is subject to happen at anytime. The Bible never sets a date as to when the Lord will come, but always presents it as something that could happen at any moment.

Instead of trying to set dates or figure out when the Lord is coming, we should be looking for Him to come at anytime. Instead of looking for signs, we should be listening for the shout.

Our attitude should be that of G. Campbell Morgan’s who said, “I never lay my head on my pillow without thinking that, maybe before the morning breaks, the final morning may have dawned. I never began my work without thinking that perhaps He may interrupt my work and begin His own.”

We know by the Bible that our Lord is sure to come. There is no doubt about His coming. Furthermore, we should believe that our Lord is soon to come. His coming draweth nigh. His coming is at hand. He could come at anytime.

The promise of our Lord’s coming is a truth that stirs our heart. To know that He could come at anytime should both excite and encourage us as believers. It is indeed a stirring thought that before this day is over, we could be in the presence of the Lord.

James not only speaks of our uplook, looking for the Lord to return, but also our outlook. Notice secondly,

2. THE OUTLOOK THAT STRENGTHENS OUR HEART!

Not only does James speak of the coming of the Lord in both verse 7 and 8, but also admonished us to be patient. In verse 7, he tells us to be patient as we await the coming of the Lord. We are to expect the Lord to come at any time, but we also are wait patiently for His return.

In verse 8 he takes the truth of the second coming to inspire us to be patient. Life can be difficult and discouraging at times, but the knowledge that Jesus could come at any time helps us to be patient.

Let's look closer at what James has to say about being patient. First, he speaks of:

A. Patience Seen In Our Actions

Verse 7 says, *“Be patient therefore, brethren.”* The word “patient” literally means to be “long-tempered.” We would use the word “longsuffering.” It speaks of refraining from hasty retaliation in the face of provocation. David Jeremiah says that it stresses nonretaliation and means to hold one's spirit in check. When we are done wrong by others our nature wants to exact revenge. I think of a story I read about a little boy named Jack. His mother heard him screaming and ran into the bedroom to find his two-year sister pulling his hair. She got the little girl to let go of his hair and then said to Jack, “I'm sorry. She didn't mean it. She doesn't know that hurts.” The mother was barely out of the room when she heard the little girl scream. She ran back into the bedroom, “What happened?” Jack said, “She knows now!”

Whereas our tendency is to want to get even, our text admonishes us to be patient, longsuffering, and to refrain from retaliation. Instead of retaliating, we are to keep our spirit in check.

The Lord is coming, but until then, we may find ourselves the targets of others attacks and abuse. Instead of retaliating, knowing the Lord is coming we should refrain from retaliation. As we shall see in our study of verse 9, the Lord is the judge. Instead of getting revenge ourselves, let the Lord take care of the matter.

B. Patience Seen In Our Attitude

In verse 7 James uses the illustration of a farmer. We read, *“Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.”*

The word “husbandman” simply means, “one who tills the soil.” James is speaking of a farmer who plows and plants his field and then waits for the growth and harvest of his crop.

He describes how the farmer waits for the early and latter rain. The early rain here would come around the last of March and the first of April. This rain would soften the hard-baked soil for the plowing and planting.

The latter rain would come around the last of September and first of October. This rain was essential for the growth and maturing of the crops.

James speaks of how the farmer *“hath long patience for it.”* The words speak of a constant attitude of expectancy. The farmer knows that when he plants the seed his crop will not be ready for harvesting overnight or in a few days. He knows there is a period of time that he has to wait. Yet, he waits with the expectancy that in time his crops will grow and be ready for harvesting.

Therefore, James says in verse 8, *“Be ye also patient.”* As we wait for the Lord to return, we are to wait with expectancy. We are to live with an attitude of expectancy. Just as the farmer waits expectantly for the day to harvest his crop, we are to wait expectantly for the Lord’s return.

He could come today, but if not, we should look for Him tomorrow. He could come this week, but if not, we should look for Him next week. He could come this year, but if not, we should look for Him next year. His coming may even be years away, but nonetheless we are to wait and expect Him to come just as He said.

C. Patience Seen In Our Affliction

In verse 8 we read, *“stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.”* Let me remind you that James is writing to a people that are undergoing great trials and persecution.

If you remember our first study, we saw in verse 1 that he addressed his letter to a “scattered” people, not a sheltered people. They were suffering

much because they were Christians.

The word “stablish” literally speaks of, “strengthening your hearts.” The word means, “to fix, to plant.” We would say, “prop up.” One writer gave this definition: “You must put iron in your heart.”

James was saying, “Don’t let the things you are going through cause you to fall or fail. Don’t let these things uproot you. Be firm, be fixed; be like a tree planted in the ground with its roots reaching deep in the earth.

What were they to prop their hearts up with? It was with the truth that the Lord could come at any moment. When we are going through hard times, look up! Jesus could come at any moment and remove us from all our trials and sufferings.

The thought that Jesus could come at any moment ought to be iron in our hearts. It ought to encourage us to keep on keeping on, no matter how dark or difficult things may be.

May I say that as we near the coming of the Lord, instead of letting the things we go through in life get us down, we should let out iron in our heart. The nearer we get to the Lord’s coming, the more excited we ought to be that our race is just about over. Our journey is about finished.

I read about this monk that joined a monastery and took a vow of silence. After the first ten years, his superior called him in and asked him if he had anything to say, but instructed him that he must limit himself to two words. The monk said, "Food bad." Ten more years went by and the monk was once again called before his superior and asked if he had anything to say, once again reminding him that he must limit what he said to two words. The monk said, "Bed hard." Another ten years went by and once again he was called before his superior and asked if he had anything to say. The monk said, "I quit." His superior looked at him and said, "Well, it doesn't surprise me. All you have done since you've been here is complain."

Someone has said that you will find as a rule, those who complain about the way the ball bounces, usually are the ones that dropped it.

A middle-aged man, known for his constant complaining, inherited a large sum of money. However, it was not as much as he thought it would be. He complained for weeks about the amount he had actually got. Finally, one day he told his wife that he was going to buy a farm for them to enjoy in their retirement. He asked his wife, "What do you think I should name it?" His wife replied, "Why don't you call it 'Belly-Acres'?"

In our present study of James we come to the second example of patience in chapter five. In verses 7-11, James gives us three examples of patience:

(Vs.7-8) The patience of the farmer

(Vs.9-10) The patience of the prophets

(Vs.11) The patience of Job

In our last study (Vs.7-8), we saw that we are to be patient as we look and await the Lord's return. We saw the patience of the farmer as he waits for the early and latter rain.

In the second example (Vs.9-10) we see the patience of the prophets. James uses the patience of the prophets to teach us important lessons about complaining. Let's notice these two verses and seek to learn further truths about patience as illustrated in the prophets.

1. THE BEHAVIOR THAT IS CONSIDERED!

In verse 9, we read, *“Grudge not one against another, brethren.”* The word “grudge” speaks of complaining and grumbling. The word literally speaks of “sighing” or “groaning” because of undesirable circumstances that the individual suffers. It describes an inner feeling of dissatisfaction that involves a feeling of criticism and faultfinding. In simple words, James is speaking of grumbling or complaining.

It would appear there were some who were complaining and grumbling about the things that were happening in their lives. What was happening in their lives? In verse 10, James spoke of the prophets as *“suffering affliction.”* The two words in our English Bible are actually one word that comes from a compound word that speaks of suffering that comes from hardship or misfortune.

As we saw in our last study and throughout the book of James, life was not easy for these believers. Being a Christian had thrust them into many different kinds of trials, hardships, and afflictions. Not all of these believers were taking these hardships patiently. There were some that were complaining and grumbling about what they were going through.

Understanding this, notice with me a couple of further details about their complaining.

A. How Their Complaining Was Directed

Notice carefully what James says in verse 9, *“Grudge not (complain or grumble not) one against another, brethren.”* They were venting their feelings against each other; against their brothers and sisters in the Lord.

James Blanchard in his commentary on James describes their conduct: “Here were Christians under sever pressure and beginning to fray at the edges. Soon they would begin to grumble at their circumstances and then, tragically, start directing their grumbling at each other.”

I think we all easily relate to what was happening. How often when we are under pressure or going through a hard time, we vent our feelings in the direction of people that have nothing to do with what we are going through. A husband snaps his wife’s head off because he has had a hard day a work. The wife jumps down the husband’s throat because she has had a terrible day.

I think of a husband that was talking with a co-worker at work who

was telling him of how he was always taking his wife roses. This husband decided that he would surprise his wife and take her home a dozen roses. When he got home that afternoon, instead of just walking in, he decided that he would ring the doorbell. He thought, “She is really going to be surprise when she opens the door and finds me standing here with these roses.” When the wife opened the door, she went berserk. She screamed out, “This is the last straw. The washing machine broke down this morning; Johnny fell at school and broke his arm, I had to sit in the waiting room for three hours, and when I got home the dog had drug the trash out all over the house. And now, you come home drunk.”

The same idea is found in Hebrews 12:15, *“Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.”* The writer of Hebrews not only speaks of bitterness troubling the one that is bitter, but others are defiled as well. He is describing how when we are bitter, we often vent our bitterness toward others.

These believers were experiencing and encountering many difficult things. The problem was, some were venting their frustration and irritation towards those who were not responsible.

B. How Their Complaining Was Denounced

James says in verse 9, *“Grudge not one against another, brethren.”* The grammatical structure of his words indicates that such grumbling was taking place and must be stopped. James fully understands what they are going through and is not unsympathetic toward their circumstances, but firmly states that venting their feelings toward their brethren cannot be tolerated or allowed. It has to be stopped. It is bad enough that people on the outside are trying to destroy them, but even worse when they engage in behavior that threatens to destroy their fellowship and relationship with one another.

Someone has written:

To walk in love with saints above

Will be a wondrous glory;

To walk below with saints we know—

Well, that’s another story!

To walk below with the saints we know is precisely what James is encouraging. He is seeking to develop their fellowship and protect it from anything that could cause division. He says, "Stop your grumbling against the brethren. They are not the source of your suffering."

2. THE BEHAVIOR THAT IS CONDEMNED!

James not only denounces their behavior, but further states that it is a behavior that will be condemned. He tells them to stop their complaining, "*lest ye be condemned.*" What do we see in these words?

A. The Judgment That Is Awaiting

The word "condemned" means, "to sentence or judge." James is reminding them that they are facing a day of judgment. He is referring to the hour when every believer will stand before God and give an account of themselves.

The Bible says in Romans 14:12, "*So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.*" Also, we read in 2 Corinthians 5:10, "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*"

Each of us will one day stand before the Lord to give an account of our life. The words of James tell us that even our complaining, specifically; how we treat others, will be one of the subjects that will be judged.

I read about a little old lady that entered a department store and was startled when a band began to play and a dignified executive pinned an orchid on her dress and handed her a crisp hundred-dollar bill. She was the store's millionth customer. Television cameras were focused on her and reporters began interviewing. "Tell me," one asked, "just what did you come here for today?" The lady hesitated for a minute, and then answered, "I'm on my way to the Complaint Department."

James reminds us that we are on our way, to the place and time, when our complaints will be dealt with.

B. The Judgment That Is Approaching

We read in verse 9, "*Behold, the Judge standeth before the door.*" The Judge is of course the Lord Himself. He is the only rightful Judge and it is the Lord Himself, the One that knows everything about us, that will do

the judging.

James describes the Lord as standing before the door. The picture is of someone standing before a door and getting ready to push open the door and come inside. James is speaking of the impending and imminent return of the Lord. He described the Lord as standing at the door and could come through the door at any moment.

As believers, we should live our lives in light of the Lord's coming. We should view the nearness of our Lord's return as if He were standing at the door, ready to come.

We read in Revelation 22:12, *"And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be."* The Lord's coming should be viewed as sure and soon. He will come and may come today. We should consider the Lord's coming as a time of reward and also as a time of review.

Why should we stop complaining? It is because we will one day be judged for complaining and any day we may face that judgment.

3. THE BEHAVIOR THAT IS COMMENDED!

After speaking to these believers directly about their behavior, James draws their attention to the prophets and their behavior. James says in verse 10, *"Take my brethren, the prophets...for an example."* The word "example" speaks of a model or a pattern. The word "Take" is emphatic, which calls for a definite act on their part. They are to hold before themselves the behavior of the Old Testament prophets as their model and example. What kind of example or model were they?

A. They Are A Model Of What To Expect

James speaks of these prophets as those, *"who have spoken in the name of the LORD."* These prophets were the communicators of God's Word. They delivered "What Thus Saith The Lord." They were men called by God and committed to God.

Yet, they were not immune from suffering. As we saw earlier, the words *"suffering affliction"* speaks of hardships and misfortune. These were men sold out to God, but their dedication to God did not shelter them from these hardships.

James, as he has done throughout the book, once again reminds them that being a Christian does not shelter one from hardship. Do you

remember how he began the book? Notice 1:2, *“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.”* It is not a case of “if” but “when.”

Just as the prophets suffered, we will suffer. Trials and hardships are to be expected in the life of the believer.

B. They Are A Model Of How To Endure

James tells us in verse 10 that these prophets faced their suffering with *“patience.”* We saw this word in our last study as we looked at verses 7-8. We saw that the word “patience” literally speaks of being longsuffering. It speaks of an attitude of self-restraint that enables one to refrain from retaliation in the face of provocation.

Here is the point that James is making. Did the prophets retaliate when persecuted? No! Did they vent out their bottled up frustrations and irritations at fellow prophets or other believers? No! They sailed many a stormy sea and faced many a dark storm, yet they endured them all with patience. Their patience is a model to how we are to face the trials and hardships of life.

A man was walking through a supermarket with a screaming baby in the shopping cart. A woman nearby noticed that time and again the man would calmly say: “Keep calm, Albert. Keep calm, Albert.” Finally, in admiration for the man’s patience as the child continued to wail, the woman walked up to him and said: “Sir, I must commend you for your patience with baby Albert.” To which the man replied, drawing himself up: “Madam, I am Albert!”

As believers we will experience and encounter situations that will test our patience, yet like the prophets we are to endure with patience.

There is an ancient story that comes from China about a family famous for its happiness and its freedom from quarreling. For nine generations, no one had left the home. So the household of sons and sons’ sons and their families was very large. Yet they had no disagreements, no discourtesies, no jealousy or self-seeking.

At length, the emperor himself heard the fame of this enviable household, and he marveled. For the sake of other families in the land, he sent an imperial messenger to the home, bade him ask for the elder of the household, and say to him:

“His majesty the emperor wishes to know the secret of your family’s happiness. He bids you take this scroll, and on it write down the reasons for your household’s harmony.”

When the old man who was the head of the family saw the messenger, he knelt to receive his emperor’s orders, took the scroll, and sat down to write. For a long while he wrote, carefully and slowly. Then he rolled up the scroll and courteously handed it back to the royal messenger. Far away in the palace the emperor eagerly took the scroll, unrolled it, and gazed at its line after line of painstakingly written words. Each word was the same: “Patience.”

Like the prophets before us, may we be known for our patience.

As one makes their way through the book of James you see that he uses certain personalities to illustrate certain spiritual truths. He has used Abraham, Rahab, and Job. Now, as he comes to the close of his letter, he once again illustrates a spiritual truth by drawing our attention to another Biblical personality - Elijah.

Elijah is mentioned by New Testament writers more than any other Old Testament personality. His name occurs nine times in Matthew, nine times in Mark, eight times in Luke, twice in John, and once in Romans and James. When you consider the life of Elijah, there is much about his life that instructs and inspires. As for James, it was his prayer life that he sought to bring to our attention.

James has been talking about prayer and to illustrate mighty, prevailing prayer, he could not have picked a better example. Elijah was more than just a man of prayer. He was a man that mightily prevailed in prayer. What does it mean by mighty, prevailing prayer? I am talking about the kind of prayer that gets answers from God. I am speaking of the kind of prayer in which man reaches up in asking and God reaches down in answering.

As we read the Bible we see that prayer is to be a fact in our life. Believers are to be among many things, a praying people. Prayer is to be a custom and habit in our life. The simple truth is that any failure in our life can be traced to a prayer failure. But prayer is to be more than a fact. It is to be a force.

Perhaps there is no other person in Church history that is more of a testimony to the practice and power of prayer than George Mueller. He knew prayer as both a fact and force in his life. Mueller by prayer and prayer alone built an orphanage that at one point was caring for more than 2,000 children. Mueller never asked for a single penny or ever made his needs known, except to God in prayer. Prayer can be more than a fact in our life. It can be a mighty force.

When James draws our attention to Elijah, he reminds us that prayer can be and should be a force in our life. Elijah was a man that learned to prevail in prayer. As believers, we should learn to prevail in prayer. In verse 16 we read, *"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."* He then gives us in Elijah a specific example of how the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man can prevail.

Let's consider the example of Elijah's prayer life by looking at it through the words, *"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."* First, notice with me:

1. THE PERSON OF PRAYER!

The first word that I draw from the statement is the word "man." Let's begin by thinking of Elijah the man. From our text we learn what kind of man he was. First, I point out that Elijah was a:

A. REGULAR MAN

It is easy for us to read our Bible and place the great saints of the Scriptures on a high and lofty pedestal. We tend to put them into categories reserved for a select few. We see them as giants among men, and in a sense they are. Yet, we must not forget they were only men -- human beings like you and me. Nothing more and nothing less.

Elijah was one of the most honored and revered prophets to the Jewish people. He has been called, "the grandest and most romantic character Israel ever produced." There were numerous traditions that grew up around Elijah and exaggerated opinions developed, ascribing him super-human traits. Yet, as James draws our attention to him he reminds us that he was just a regular, ordinary man. Before he tells of what Elijah accomplished through prayer, he reminds us that Elijah was a man just like each one of us. We read in verse 17, *"Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are."*

Elijah had the same nature that each of us has. You could say, "Elijah put his pants on just like we do, one leg at a time." The word translated "subject to like passions" simply means, "to be similarly effected." One writer speaking of the statement wrote: "Elijah was subject to the same human emotion and liable to the same weaknesses that we all have." Another translator rendered the words, "with feelings just like ours."

We have the same thought in Acts 14 when Paul preached at Iconium. When he performed miracles the people began to cry out, *"The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men"* (Acts 14:1). The response of Paul and Barnabas was, *"We also are men of like passions with you"* (Acts 14:15). Paul was saying, "We are not gods. We are only human beings like each of you."

In case you think that your praying could never be effective and prevailing as Elijah, remember he was just a human being like you. Elijah

was a great man, but he was just a man. James reminds us of the humanity of Elijah to disarm our feelings that we could never get answers to prayer as he did. The emphasis on his likeness to all of us is an encouragement that we are praying to the same God that Elijah prayed and that God can answer our prayers as He did Elijah's. Furthermore, we not only see him a regular man, but also as a:

B) Righteous Man

Verse 16 tells us that mighty prevailing prayer is the result of a "*righteous man.*" Elijah may have been just a man, yet there was mark of holiness and righteousness about his life. He was a man wholly devoted to God. Oftentimes Elijah is addressed as "a man of God." He was a man committed and consecrated to God. The people of his day saw him and knew him to be a man that belonged to God.

In 2 Kings 1:10 we read, "*And Elijah answered and said to the captain of the fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.*" Elijah conditioned the answering of his prayer on the matter of his being a man of God or a righteous man.

God answered his prayer. If we are to prevail in prayer we must as well be righteous. What does it mean to be righteous? The word describes someone who by implication is "innocent or holy." To be righteous is simply to be right with God! To prevail with God in prayer we must be clean before God. There can be no unconfessed sin in our heart. To get an audience with God requires that we be in a right relationship with God.

The Psalmist was very straight forward when he stated: "*If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me*" (Psalm 66:18). Nothing could said any plainer. If I have something in my heart that is not right, the Lord will not hear my prayers. If He cannot hear me, I will never get an answer.

I read about a Sunday School class of young girls that wrote missionaries to tell them they had been praying for them. The teacher told them that the missionaries were busy and not to expect them to answer their letter. One little girl wrote: "We have been praying for you. We are not expecting an answer."

When it comes to unconfessed sin in our life, there is no use to expect an answer. Mighty prevailing prayer is prayer offered from the heart of

someone that is righteous. The second thing about prayer that I want you to see in Elijah is:

2. THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER!

Notice with me the words, "*The effectual fervent prayer.*" In these words we learn something about how we are to pray. First, we see that are to:

A. Pray Specifically

The word "prayer" that is used could be translated "supplication." It is a word that is restricted to petition prayer. It describes the kind of praying where one brings specific petitions to God. There are specific things that are desired and being asked for in prayer. In verse 15 the word "prayer" that is used speaks of prayer that is exclusively addressed to God but includes all types of prayer. But in verse 16 we see the kind of prayer that specifically asks God for specific things.

When you look at Elijah you find that when he prayed he asked for specific things. First, we see in verse 17 that he prayed that it might not rain. The result it did not rain. In verse 18 he prayed that it would rain and it did rain. Elijah did not pray in generalities but prayed specifically.

I read about this little boy acting up in church. His dad kept telling him to sit still and be quite. Finally the dad grabbed him and started out of the church. They were about halfway down the aisle when the little boy cried out where everyone could hear him, "Ya'll pray for me now." You could say he was being specific in prayer.

I think of Philippians 4:6, "*Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*" We are to let our "requests" be made known to God. The word speaks of particular things for which we ask God. We often pray, "Lord, meet my needs." That is praying generally. To pray, "Lord, I need strength," or "Lord, will you give me a job," is to pray specifically. To pray, "Lord, bless our church" is to pray generally. To pray, "Lord, supply the money we need to build the new building" is to pray specifically. To pray, "Lord, touch my children" is to pray generally. To pray, "Lord, save Joe, bring Ann back" is to pray specifically.

Prevailing prayer is when we bring specific requests and petitions to God. Furthermore, we see that we are to:

B. Pray Earnestly

The words *"effectual fervent"* prayer come from one word from which we get our word "energy." The word literally means "stretched out" and gives the picture of a runner stretching for the finish line with his last gasp of energy. James is telling us that if we are to prevail in prayer we must approach God with integrity and with intensity. A simple way of saying it is that we must pray with all our hearts.

Three preachers were talking about prayer and the appropriate and effective positions in prayer. As they were talking a telephone repairman working on the phone line was listening. One preacher said that he felt the key was in his hands. He always held his hands together and pointed them upward as a form or symbolic worship. The second suggested that real prayer was conducted on ones knees. The third suggested that the only way to pray was while stretched out flat on your face. The telephone repairman spoke up and said, "I have found that the most powerful prayer I ever made was while I was dangling upside down by my heels from a telephone pole suspended forty-feet above the ground."

I am sure he was praying from the heart. That is how we are to pray. We are to put ourselves into prayer. We are to pour our hearts out in prayer. The writer said in Psalm 62:8, *"Trust in Him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before Him: God is a refuge for us. Selah."*

That is how Elijah prayed. He not only prayed specifically but earnestly. His prayer was more than a little prayer prayed over the food he was about to eat. He got down to business with God and poured his heart out to God. He prayed earnestly. The final thing about prayer that I point out is:

3. THE POWER OF PRAYER!

Notice the words, *"availeth much."* The words literally mean, "is strong, is able to do much." The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man is able to do much in prayer. This kind of praying is powerful praying. It is the kind of prayer in which man asks and God answers. It is the kind of prayer found in Jeremiah 33:3, *"Call unto me and I will answer thee and shew thee great and mighty things."* This is the kind of praying we see in Elijah. He got things from God when he prayed.

In verses 17-18 we see described a particular occasion when Elijah prayed and God answered. The account is found in 1 Kings 17:1, *"And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be*

dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." Let's look at this particular occasion in Elijah's life and what it teaches us about the power of prayer. First, we see;

A) What Man Must Acknowledge In Prayer

The Bible tells us that when Elijah prayed it did not rain for the space of three and a half years. It is important to understand that Elijah's prayer was more than he getting his will done in heaven. The answer to his prayer was a matter of God's will being done on earth. The shutting of the heavens was an act of God's judgment on the land. The Bible does not reveal the moment, but somewhere God had made his will known to Elijah and when he prayed that it might not rain, it was after God's will.

It has been well said that nothing lies outside the reach of prayer except that which lies outside the will of God. We read in 1 John 5:14-15, *"And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."* It is important to understand that God answers our prayers according to HIS will and not ours. Let me emphasize that prayer is not getting our will done in heaven, but getting God's will done on earth.

Jesus expressed this truth when He taught us to pray, *"And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth" (Luke 11:2).* It did not rain for three and half years because it was God's will. When it did rain, it was according to God's will. When we pray, our prayers must be governed and guided by God's will. Furthermore, we see:

B) What God Can Accomplish By Prayer

Elijah prayed, *"that is might not rain and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months."* He prayed a second time, *"and the heavens gave rain, and the earth brought forth fruit."* We see prayer being answered! In the answers we see to Elijah's prayer, we see not what Elijah did, but what God did. We see God working and moving in response to prayer. Prayer is the means of bringing God into what we do. Prayer is the avenue whereby we see God work.

R. A. Torrey said, "Prayer is the key that opens wide the inexhaustible storehouse of divine grace and power. There is only one limit to what prayer can do; that is what God can do."

Torrey speaking of D.L. Moody described him as a far greater person of prayer than preacher. He spoke of how time and time again he was confronted by obstacles that seemed insurmountable, but he always knew the way to surmount and overcome all difficulties. Torrey said, "He knew the way to bring to pass anything that needed to be brought to pass."

Thomas Guthrie said, "The direct power of prayer is, in a sense, omnipotent. Prayer moves the hand that moves the world." Jonathan Edwards said, "There is no way that Christians, in a private capacity, can do so much to promote the work of God and advance the kingdom of Christ as by prayer." Charles Trumbull said, "Prayer is releasing the energies of God. For prayer is asking God to do what we cannot do."

What were all these men saying? They were saying that there is power in prayer! They are telling us that God can accomplish much through a person that will pray. Elijah prayed and God answered in a great and mighty way. Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, yet he reminds us that we can prevail in prayer. LET'S ALWAYS PRAY!

In the early beginning of the book of James we receive the instruction, *"Do not err, my beloved brethren" (1:18)*. The word "err" simply means, "to stray." The word was used as a metaphor of a sheep wandering from the flock. We read in Matthew 18:12, *"How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?"* The word "astray" is the same translated "err" in James 1:16. As sheep in God's flock, we are warned not to wander away or stray from the Lord.

The command reminds us that it is possible to wander or stray away. I think of Robert Robinson's great hymn, "Come Thou Fount." The third stanza says:

O to grace how great a debtor

Daily I'm constrained to be!

Let Thy goodness like a fetter

Bind my wandering heart to Thee.

Prone to wander -- Lord I feel it --

Prone to leave the God I love;

Here's my heart - O take and seal it,

Seal it for Thy courts above.

We are indeed great debtors to the grace of God and we are daily constrained to be faithful to God. Yet, how prone we are to wander. There is that tendency and always the possibility of erring. Therefore, in the early part of the book James says, *"Do no err, my beloved brethren."*

There is not only the possibility that we can err, but there is also the responsibility we have when people err. It is this responsibility James addresses as he comes to the conclusion of his letter. The word "err" although used as a metaphor of sheep going astray, comes from a Greek word that speaks of a planet. The word is "planao" in which you can see the word planet. The ancients watched the skies and saw the planets as wandering among the fixed stars of heaven. When James used the word he saw those fixed stars in the church, those who were faithful to God and living for God. He saw those who had followed his admonition not to

err. He also saw those who were like planets wandering among the stars. He says to the fixed stars, go after the wandering planets.

Christians who are doing their best to live for God, serve God, stay in Church, and be faithful to God and His will, have the responsibility of bringing back the wandering sheep. Let's call this responsibility, "Operation Restoration." When someone gets out of church and away from the Lord, we are to take upon ourselves the responsibility of getting them back into Church and help bring them back to the Lord. We have a ministry of restoration. We are not to forget them. We are to find them. We do not have the task of rebuking them, but of restoring them.

Let's notice the final two verses of the Book of James and consider this responsibility we have. First, we see in this Operation Restoration:

1. A MINISTRY TO ACCEPT!

James says, "*Brethren, if any of you do err.*" The word "if" does not point to a particular case, but implies something that is probable. James is telling us that it is very probable that there will be those that will wander away. When this happens, what are we to do? Let me answer that question by first saying a word about:

A) *Why People Stray*

James speaks of one who has erred "*from the truth*" (5:19). What is the truth? For one thing, the truth is the Lord Jesus himself. Jesus said in John 14:6, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*" Someone that erred from the truth is someone who has wandered from the Lord.

We read in John 17:17, "*Sanctify them through Thy truth: thy word is truth.*" Someone that has erred is not only someone who has wandered from the Lord, but also from the Word. They have strayed not only from the Son of God, but also the Word of God.

Now the question is why? Notice the word "err" again and let's consider it even more closely. The tense of the verb indicates that James is not talking about a habitual wandering, but a one-time or an occasional slip. The Bible is very plain about the matter of habitual sin. When you have a case of someone living in habitual sin, it is a case of someone not being saved. It only reveals they were never saved in the first place. But in the case James describes, it is someone who has been living for God, but has strayed or wandered away.

The verb is also in the passive voice indicating that one who is wandering has been led astray by some outside force. That outside force can be a person, place, or passion. James has already reminded us of an outside force that seeks to pull us away from God (Cp. 1:14). There are those outside forces that seek to pull us away from God and back to the world. Again, it could be a person, a place, or just the lusts of our flesh. Understanding why people stray, lets also consider:

B) When People Stray

In verse 19 James speaks of one that converts the one that has strayed. He says in verse 20, "*he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way.*" The word "convert" and "converteth" simply mean, "To turn back, to bring back." James is speaking of one of those fixed stars bringing back a wandering planet. It is like a shepherd going out after a sheep that is lost.

The same thought is found in Galatians 6:1 where we read, "*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*" There is to be a ministry of restoration. Faithful believers are to go after and seek the restoration of unfaithful believers.

We are not in the business of dropping and or deserting people, but reaching people. Instead of forgetting them, lets seek to restore them. That is the ministry we are to accept. Secondly, we see:

2. A MINISTRY TO APPRECIATE!

When James speaks of those who seek to bring the wandering one back, he says, in verse 20, "*Let him know.*" These three words come from one word that is a personal word of assurance for the one who is instrumental in restoring the wandering one. The word implies that the work of restoration is a work to be appreciated. Why? First,

A) Because Of Its Reason

We are talking about people getting out of Church and away from the Lord. We are not talking about programs that are down in numbers. We are talking about people! We are not talking about attendance figures being off, but PEOPLE that are away from the Lord.

The Church of Jesus Christ is in the PEOPLE business. We are in the business of reaching people for Christ and seeing them grow and mature

in the Lord and live a life that pleases and honors God. Budgets and buildings are secondary. People are the priority. That is why Operation Restoration is a ministry to appreciate. Secondly:

B) Because Of Its Results

We shall consider the results more in detail, but in verse 20 we see that James speaks of saving a soul from death and hiding a multitude of sins. This ministry should not be appreciated because of what it means to us, but what it will mean to the one restored.

What a blessing to look out into a service and see someone who was once wandering, but living for God and serving Him. Even greater, is to see them growing in the Lord and enjoying being saved. The ministry of restoration is one to be appreciated because of what it will mean to the one restored. Lastly, notice with me that this ministry is to be:

3. A MINISTRY THAT IS ACCOMPLISHED!

Notice carefully verse 20, *"Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."* Let me point out two things we see in this statement. First, we see:

A) A Spiritual Work

We see that the converted person is saved from death and his or her sins are hidden. The ministry of restoration brings about a two-fold work in a person's life. First, they are saved from death. The word "death" speaks of punishment and not necessarily physical death. When a saved person gets away from God they will experience the chastening hand of God. By helping restore the wandering one, you are helping them to be spared from this chastening. Or possibly it could refer to premature death. The Bible does teach premature death in the life of the saved.

Secondly, a multitude of sins are hidden. The word "hide" does not speak of concealing or keeping the sins secret. The word speaks of atonement. When a person is restored they find forgiveness and even though they have committed numerous sins, those sins are forgiven and cleansed. There is a spiritual work involved in the ministry of restoration. Furthermore, we see:

B) A Successful Work

Notice carefully the words, *"that he which converteth the sinner from*

the error of his ways." The statement is a repeat from verse 19, but in this case it describes a successful work. The wandering one has been restored from his or her erring ways. Verse 19 speaks of what should be done. Verse 20 speaks of that which has been done. Operation Restoration has been successful. It is, "he which converteth."

These words remind me that we should never give up on those who have strayed. We should never quit praying for them. We should never quit calling them. We should never quit visiting them. We should never stop going after them until they are brought back. It is a ministry of "OPERATION RESTORATION!"