

## THE NEW TESTAMENT BOOK OF JAMES: AN INTRODUCTION

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### BACKGROUND

In the Old Testament, the books of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastics are considered to be “wisdom literature.” The text of James follows such a pattern in the New Testament. Even the apocryphal books of the inter-testament period, *Ecclesiasticus* (or the *Wisdom of Jesus the son of Sira*) and the *Wisdom of Solomon* were written in this very, to a Jew, recognizable style.

The popular wisdom of the ancient Jews took the form of popular proverbs, which expressed in pithy terms certain observable regularities in the world or in human behavior. For the latter reason, I am calling this look at the book of James a study of the *BEHAVIOR OF BELIEF*.

Two examples of such proverbial wisdom can also be found at Matthew 16:2, “When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red;” and Psalm 58:4, “they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear.” A more developed form of the simple proverb is the riddle or parable (Judges 9:7ff.; 14:12ff., and 2 Kings 14:9, cf. the word “fable” here). The parables, of course, reached perfection in Jesus’ teaching (cf. Matthew 13 and Luke 10).

When men began to grapple with deeper facts of experience, for example as to why the righteous suffered and as to why the wicked prospered, the wisdom literature became more than pithy statements. The *problem Psalms*, such as Psalm 73, are examples of this kind of deeper study in wisdom literature and inspiration’s demand to expand the thoughts.

Wisdom, in the Jewish sense of the term, is not simple intellectual speculation; it is practical with a real moral and spiritual content and this latter idea is a good definition of James' book. Note Proverbs 1:7 and the concept that the "fear of God is the beginning of knowledge." The truly wise man, then, is the one who views all of life in an attitude of reverence toward God, but the fool hates such wisdom!

Solomon is said to have excelled in wisdom above all others (1 Kings 4:30; Jeremiah 49:7; Obadiah 8). But, it is also the case that Jewish wisdom was not bound by race, for all know what a fool is (cf. Proverbs 17:28). There are three types of wisdom literature. 1. Village wisdom characterized by short statements as in Proverbs 20:2. 2. Royal wisdom from one of the Israelite capitals as in Proverbs 23:1-2. 3. Theological wisdom of deeper reflection such as Ecclesiastes 3:19-21. James combined all three types of wisdom literature in his book.

### **THE BEHAVIOR OF BELIEF**

As we have been noting, James is not so much a theological treatise as it is a *book of common sense*. The text covers practical matters that Christian's will face while living. Trials and temptations come to all (James 1:2, 13). James seems to have been given two purposes or major areas of discussion by the Holy Spirit: 1. He was to encourage those who were suffering. 2. He was to rebuke any erring Christians' shameful neglect of their duties, even though they were suffering.

### **THE AUTHOR**

James was the half-brother of Jesus, and seems to have been the second oldest child of Joseph and Mary (Matthew 13:55). He was not a believer in his

brother's deity until after the resurrection (John 7:5; 1 Corinthians 15:7; Acts 1:14; Galatians 1:19; 2:9, 12; Acts 15:13; 21:18). He was a prominent leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13).

He called himself a servant of God and Christ (James 1:1). This James cannot be James the son of Zebedee, for he was an apostle and was martyred (Matthew 4:21; 10:2; Mark 1:19; Luke 5:10; Acts 12:2). He cannot be James the son of Alphaeus for he was also an apostle (Matthew 10:2; Acts 1:13; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15). The author is the Lord's half-brother (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3; Galatians 1:18-19). James, the writer, did not claim to be an apostle and he did not believe in his Brother until after the resurrection, but the first two James, mentioned above, were already Jesus' disciples before His resurrection.

***In order to establish the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary (cf. Matthew 13:55 and 1:25, etcetera) the Roman Catholic church denies that James was the Lord's half-brother and in the footnote to Matthew 13:55, in their Bible, they wrote that the word brethren meant cousin and that the Mary named was the sister of the mother of Jesus. However, the term brethren is adelphos which can only mean brother. The Greek term for cousin is anepsios and the Holy Spirit instructed Matthew to use adelphos not anepsios. How determined can one be to perpetuate an error by insisting that Mary's sister was also Mary! The "virgin Mary" had at least six children, by Joseph, after she gave birth to Jesus (Mat. 13:55).***

#### **DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING**

The text had to be written after the name, Christian, was given (Acts 11:26; James 2:7). Christian is a name given by God (Isaiah 60:1-2; 55:6) after the gentiles came into the church. See Matthew 2:22 where “warned of God” is *chrematidzoo* as in Acts 11:26). James could have been written as early as AD 47.

### **CONCLUSION**

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The book of James is New Testament wisdom literature. The author was the half-brother of Jesus. James’ insistence on genuine Christian living covers the practical side of the behavior of belief.

### **STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. What pattern of Jewish literature does James’ writing follow?
2. The popular wisdom of Judaism took what form?
3. There are two examples of wisdom literature in Matthew and Psalms. What are they?
4. Is there a deeper form of wisdom literature than pithy proverbs and where is such found in the Bible?
5. The wisdom literature of Judaism had real moral and spiritual content. Of the latter two aspects, which one does James mostly follow?
6. What seem to be James’ two purposes in his book?
7. Who was James?
8. What does Catholic teaching try to say about James being Jesus’ brother?

## THE NEW TESTAMENT BOOK OF JAMES: THEME AND SERVANT

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### THEME

In my judgment, the consistent theme throughout the book of James is *genuineness*. James' entire book is filled with attempts to get God's children to recognize and grasp for themselves the ramifications of being a new creature in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). To James, inspired by the Holy Spirit, a true Christian will do such and such in a certain situation and not do such and such in the same place. James appealed to all of God's children to consider seriously whether or not they were living the real Christian life (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:5).

According to James, a true Christian would understand and bring into his own life the concept that trials and temptations can edify (James 1:2-12). Also, according to James, a true Christian would never blame God for bringing lust into the Christian's life (James 1:13-15). To James, a true Christian is always in charge of his emotions (James 1:19-20), and he will not believe that just hearing God's Word is enough (James 1:22-25). The true Christian will practice pure religion both for himself and for others (James 1:27).

As James continued his theme, by inspiration he noted that the true Christian was not prejudiced (James 2:14-26). The theme of James included wise use of the tongue for the genuine believer who followed God's wisdom (Jam. 3:1-18). The half-brother of Jesus also wrote that true friendship with God involved not loving the evil in the world and keeping God in one's plans (James 4:1-17; 5:1-6). Finally, James

insisted that a true Christian was perseverant, prayerful, and was one who reached out to his lost brother (James 5:7-20).

I want to suggest that a task for the student of James would be to ask himself two questions: 1. "Am I really like the Christian James says I am to be?" 2. "Is my Christianity really genuine?" James' book is incredibly relevant, even two thousand years after he wrote it! Do some, today, quit the church because of trials or blame God for their problems? Are there those, still, who hear and do not do? Are there members who misuse their tongues; are friends with the world, and leave God out of their plans? Are prayers for the sick, confessions of sins, and reaching out to the delinquent, things not practiced by some? Is everyone a genuine child of God today?

### SERVANT

James called himself a *servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ (James 1:1a)*. The Greek word translated *servant* is *doulos* (*bond-slave*) and is derived from *deoo* which means *to bind*. Christians should be bound to Christ and not try to drag Him wherever they want to go. The Lord is our constitutional King, not our prime minister; but for too many, Christ is no more than a figurehead.

A relative of *doulos* is *douleuoo* which also comes from *deoo*, but *douleuoo* means to work, and to work hard. A servant, bound to his master, is never inactive (1 Corinthians 15:58), for only hard-working slaves can please their masters. The *doulos* was one born a slave or purchased as a slave. The *andrapadon* was one captured and made a slave. Christians are born-again, purchased slaves of Christ (John 3:3-5; Acts 20:28). When one is born into the natural world, one is a slave to nature (gravity, food, etcetera), Christians have become slaves to God's spiritual

laws in His kingdom, or they are not citizens (Colossians 1:13).. One who is God's slave does not have the worries of other men (Matthew 6:33).

A Christian *doulos* is an absolutely obedient slave who knows no law but the law of his Master (John 14:15). His chief purpose in life is to please his Master, for he is no longer a slave to sin or to any other master (Romans 6:16-18). The Christian *doulos* practices absolute humility (Matthew 16:24) and does not claim honor for himself (1 Cor. 4:15). The Christian *doulos* is absolutely loyal and has no personal profit in view (Galatians 2:20).

### CONCLUSION

The theme of the book of James is genuineness as that term applies to how a Christian is living his trouble-filled life. The Christian is a **slave** of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What seems to be the consistent theme of James' book?
2. What are some of the subjects covered in the book?
3. What are some of the attributes of a slave of God?
4. Why are we not captured slaves of God?
5. Is it difficult to think of oneself as a slave?

## THE GREETING: JAMES 1:1

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### EXPOSITION

The author is the half-brother of Jesus and the son of Joseph and Mary. Five sons and at least two daughters of Joseph and Mary are listed and one, Jude, wrote the epistle bearing his name (Matthew 13:55; Jude 1:1). The Lord's half-brothers in the flesh did not believe He was deity during his public ministry (John 7:5), but two of them obviously did later. His resurrection seems, no doubt, to be that which changed the two.

Woods, [*Gospel Advocated Commentary Series: James, 23*] noted that James' name in Hebrew would be the equivalent of Jacob and meant "heel-catcher." The ancient Jacob, of course, grabbed Esau's heel at their birth (Genesis 25:26). Several legends have grown up around our author, James, none of which are reliable.

James called himself *the servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*, and inspiration allowed him to write it, so we know such was true. It is interesting that James makes no mention of the fact that he was the Lord's half-brother, and I think this indicates his humility. The term, translated servant, is *doulos*, already studied in this workbook. The Greek word, *doulos*, as Woods noted (24) is hard to describe in English, but means something like, *one who becomes a slave to another's will*. The Christian is a slave to the Godhead. Also note that no one can be a slave of God the Father without coming to and through the Christ (John 14:6). [See Galatians 3:26-27.]

James, the slave of his half-brother, wrote to *the twelve tribes scattered abroad*. That dispersion was of Christians, but how did James refer to them as the *twelve tribes*? Abraham was the “father” of the chosen people, the Jews and eventually Abraham’s grandson, Jacob, fathered twelve sons after God named Jacob, Israel (Genesis 17-35). The twelve sons of Jacob are listed in Genesis 35:23-26.

[Note Joshua 7:14-18 and the designation tribes or families for the twelve descendants of Jacob.] That group of twelve became thirteen, however, when the tribe of Joshua was divided into Ephraim and Mannaseh (Joshua 17:14-17; Numbers 26:28). But, since the tribe of Levi received no land inheritance in Palestine, the Israelites were known in history as the twelve tribes.

To whom did James write, then? If the student will notice that James was writing to *brethren* (James 1:2) and that James was a *servant of the Lord Jesus Christ*, the student will have no problem in knowing that James was writing to Christians that he, under inspiration, designated as *twelve tribes*. James’ *brethren* also had a new worthy name and not an ancient Jewish one (James 2:7; cf. Acts 11:26).

It is also the case that Jesus designated the church as the *twelve tribes*, but meaning the new kingdom over which the apostles would have authority: “And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Isreal” (Matthew 19:28). The apostles’ writings are still in charge of New Testament Christians (Ephesians 2:20) and Jesus is now seated on His throne (Hebrews 1:3). The only conclusion I can

draw is that James was writing to scattered Christians (perhaps Acts 8:4). And, the true “Jew,” today, is a Christian (Romans 2:28-29; Galatians 3:7; 6:16).

James greeted (*chairein* from *charis, rejoice*) a persecuted people and would urge them to find peace and joy in their new surroundings. James’ Greek greeting indicated an expressed wish for their happiness, even though they were in dire straits. In today’s violently evil world, the Christian can still be “greeted” with joy by focusing on the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **CONCLUSION**

The half-brother of Jesus was chosen by God to write wisdom literature to persecuted Christians who were James’ brothers in the Lord. An unbelieving, fleshly relative of the Christ had become an encourager of believers. The irony surrounding James’ change can only be explained by the fact that James had seen his resurrected half-sibling (I Corinthians 15:7).

### **STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. Jesus had how many brothers and sisters?
2. What is James’ name in Hebrew and what does it mean?
3. What is the possible meaning of servant?
4. Who are the twelve tribes?
5. What is so ironic about James’ greeting?

## OUTWARD TRIALS: JAMES 1:2-4

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### EXPOSITION

By using the term translated *greeting* (James 1:2b), James had expressed his wish for their happiness. He then wrote to them the “how” of having inner joy. They must *count it all joy*; that is, they were to *hegesasthe* (*count*) or *consider* that being scattered could be an occasion for inner rejoicing (James 1:2a). The difficulty of the foregoing consideration is obvious to all who suffer outward trials who are yet children of a loving God. [The word translated *temptation* is the same in James 1:13-15, and can mean an outward trial or inward lust. James has to be referring to an outward trial at this point, for he wrote that one would *fall* into this problem. Woods wrote: “James would not bid the brethren to rejoice when being subjected to the enticements of sin” (*Commentary 35*).]

Not only were being driven from one’s homeland, leaving families and work, great trials for those first century Christians, but even today trials are present for one can be ridiculed for holding to the truth; can be disappointed by others; can be put in physical danger (especially today in America); can be very unpopular; and can lose one’s business and job. Also, death comes to loved ones and friends along with much suffering. How one “gets through” such is James’ point. Such trials are designed to make a Christian stronger and to enhance one’s ability to get through the next trial. This wisdom is from God (James 3:17). Someone remarked that a Christian should be like an old oak tree whose roots dig deeper when the wind blows.

The result of enduring the trial is patience (James 1:3). It is one's faith that is tested, not one's doubts. The crucible that tests (*dokimon, proving; as heat does in smelting ore*) faith is a trial, and one will never know how strong one's faith is until it is tested. The word *patience* (*Greek, hupomone*) has two senses in the original: there is the willingness to endure, and the ability to use the trial to the advantage of gaining strength. So the Lord said: "In your patience possess ye your souls" (Luke 21:19). [The textual fact is that the test is for the Christian's benefit, and is not designed as proof for God's existence.]

According to James 1:4 the Christian must participate in allowing the trial to do its work of establishing steadfastness. (It is *patience* in the King James Version. One version has the translation of "unwavering constancy.") The manner in which one approaches any trial will determine success in accomplishing God's will. And the "perfect work" or result of endurance is that the Christian becomes more mature (cf. Hebrews 2:10). The one who endures by faith will learn to be "lacking in nothing" (James 1:4b).

### **CONCLUSION**

The term translated *lacking nothing* (*en medemi leipomenoi*) has a meaning akin to racing (James 1:4b). One who endures by faith will never be outrun in the race for maturity. He will succeed. "Know ye not that they that run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize" (1 Corinthians 9:24).

### **STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. To what kind of "temptation" was James referring at James 1:2?
2. The trials through which the faithful go, if endured, result in what?
3. What is the key to inner joy during trials?
4. Who is being tested and why?

## WISDOM TO ENDURE: JAMES 1:5-12

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### EXPOSITION

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not” (James 1:5). “The careful reader will observe that quite often in James the leading word of the clause preceding becomes the chief point with which the verse following begins. This is a figure designated by grammarians as *anadiplosis* (sic), defined by Webster as ‘Repetition of a word, especially the last word of one clause at the beginning of the next’” (Woods 40).

It seems that James anticipated a question that might arise out of his teaching of counting it all joy during trials (James 1:2). If one lacks the wisdom to get through such, the inspired advice is to go to God. Of course, one must realize one’s need for help and that wisdom is an attribute of God (Proverbs 1:7, 20-26; 2:6-10; 3:5-7; 4:7; 8:11-36; et al). Remember that God does not have to force Himself to give to the faithful prayer, and that the trials of life are not the result of God’s displeasure with us. God’s answer is always based on our best welfare, and if He says no, perhaps He has in mind a greater blessing later.

The key is to *ask in faith, nothing wavering* (James 1:6). To illustrate: a young boy asked a preacher to pray that the boy’s sister would read her Bible. The preacher immediately knelt and began to pray, but the lad ran out of the room. Later the preacher admonished the boy that when he asked someone to pray, it was not polite to run away. The surprised lad exclaimed, “Sir, I was just going home to see my sister read her Bible!” One who doubts prayer and that God will answer will not

be heard. God is faithful, but the problem of unanswered prayer may rest with us (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:9). We must ask *in faith* (Hebrews 11:6; 1Peter 3:12). As did not Abraham, we must not stagger (King James—wavering) in believing that God will do what He says (cf. Romans 4:16-20). When our children ask for something, it is just as important as to *how* they ask as to *what* they ask. The Christian cannot waver (*diakrino*; literally to see through; i.e. to be able to distinguish what is possible) in faith when asking for wisdom to endure trials.

The doubters are *double minded* (*dipsuchos, two souled*) for they doubt God's ability to supply wisdom, and so they receive nothing (James 1:7-8; cf 1 Chronicles 12:33). The seeming struggle between our wills and God's should not exist. Have you ever known someone who can never make up his mind?

Christianity gives self-respect (James 1:9). That is, God's wisdom places all on the same level (cf. Galatians 3:28). No matter the station in one's life, God's wisdom can manage it, and the one James considered here was a brother, poor or rich. There is no caste system in true Christianity. Being poor, then, does not indicate a better status with God, nor does being rich. God looks at the state of the heart. Trials not only should mature us, they should humble us (cf. Proverbs 30:7-9). One should not boast in riches, but must be content with what God gives (James 1:10). [Note that when a stalk of wheat is loaded, it stoops down!] In both verses nine and ten, James was writing to Christians, proving that all of God's children, rich, poor or in between, are worthwhile in His sight. [Note that in an asylum for the mentally ill, rich and poor alike are on the same level; therefore riches are just as destructive as poverty.]

“For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heart, 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” (James 1:11).

See Isaiah 40:6. In the constant struggle to obtain riches of life, we often wear out life itself. To illustrate: A child was cared for by servants, but one day the lad’s father lost his fortune. The father got a day job, and came home one day and the son climbed into his dad’s lap and said, “Don’t get rich again, daddy, for now I can come around you!” See Matthew 13:6. If we save, save, save, soon life withers away and James noted that if the rich will not humble themselves before God, the rich will be humiliated when they fade away at death. The grass that fades is no longer beautiful to see. Someone remarked that worldly riches are like nuts. Many clothes are torn in getting them; many a tooth is broken in cracking them; and never a belly is filled by eating them.

The best reward to be earned in this life is the crown of life in the next world (James 1:12). The *temptation* here is still in the context of an *outward trial that comes in life*. Some are tempted to run away from the trials of life, but it should be remembered that the crown is never given to a runner until the race is over (cf. Revelation 2:10). It is worthwhile to suffer here, and to be unpopular here, if one is to *be* with God there. The term translated *blessed* is *makarios* and means more than happy, for it describes a condition of mind resulting from inner peace. No matter what happens in this world, the next one is far better. In fact, *blessedness* is a characteristic of God, Himself (1 Samuel 1:11). To the Greeks, a crown was always a mark of honor and dignity.

## CONCLUSION

One may say he loves God, but when the trials come in life, and they will, how does that one react? James wrote that his brethren should find inner peace in outward trials. Eternal life is lost in this life, not in the next one.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What question often arises for the faithful when confronted with trials?
2. God will answer prayer, but what may hinder His reply?
3. What is a "double-minded" man?
4. A true result of Christianity is \_\_\_\_\_ (James 1:9).
5. Men of the world usually regard the loss of what as a catastrophe?
6. What can "wear out" life itself?
7. What is the reward for one who endures the trials of life?
8. What can cause one to waver in his prayer life?

## TEMPTATION AND SIN: JAMES 1:13-18

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### EXPOSITION

James used the word *peiradzo* here (James 1:13), but the context is a reference to an *inward temptation [a solicitation to do evil]* rather than an outward trial, as in verses two through four of chapter one. Man is not only disposed to blame God for the outward trials of life, but man may also tend to blame God for the lusts of life. How difficult it seems to be for the human mind to recognize its own failure. [God has given us food to eat, but He is in no way responsible for gluttony.]

The Calvinistic doctrine of predestination has long meant that God is responsible for all that happens, including sin! The modern psychological and Marxist cultural dialectic holds that man's environment is responsible for man's troubles. A poet expressed: "Thou knowest thou hast formed me, with passions wild and strong; and listening to their witching voice has often led me wrong." However James, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote that every sin man commits begins in his own lust: "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" (James 1:13). God is impregnable, and Christians are ordered to fight their own fleshly desires (Romans 6:12). God *permits* the circumstances of life in order to ensue man's freewill, but God does not *prompt* to sin.

Desire seeking satisfaction is what prompts to sin. "But every man is tempted, when he is draw away of his own lust, and enticed" (James 1:4). One cannot do very much about temptation, but he can stop it from becoming sin by not

allowing the temptation to entice him. The term, *lust*, is *epithumia* [desire, and here evil] and the term *enticed* is *deleadzomenos* meaning to *trap as with bait*. It must be concluded, then, that nothing from without is able to cause sin, but can only bring the temptation. Note that James was very explicit that it is one's **own** lust that entices, meaning that what tempts one may not tempt another. Christians will have to learn to avoid those circumstances that would **hook** them into sinning.

Sin will move forward, if allowed to company with the devil. "Then, when sin hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:15). Human lust is the "mother" of sin, and when the devil becomes the "father," sin is born! It is a sin to say one never sins, but it is a sin to Christians to let sin finish without repenting and confessing it (1 John 1:7-10). Someone wrote: "He who falls into sin is a man; he who grieves over sin is a saint; he who boasts of sin is a demon."

No true child of God would ever blame God for sin, and such blasphemy is a great error. So James wrote: "Do not err, my beloved brethren" (James 1:16). A Christian should never make the spiritual mistake of blaming God or anyone or anything else for the Christian's sin! Because: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the father of lights, in whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). Woods wrote: "The motive that prompts men to give may be good, but there must be lacking in the nature of the case the wholeness, the completeness, and the thoroughness of the gift which God bestows" (*Commentary* 66). If anything is evil, it did not come from God. There

is no admixture of evil in the God who bestows and no shadow ever falls over Him obscuring His goodness. He could never lead anyone astray.

God's greatest and perfect gift is redemption. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (James 1:18). Instead of regarding God as the source of evil, it should be remembered that He it is who willed to give us eternal life in His Son (1 John 5:11). Since redemption was willed, it can never be viewed as accidental or mystical. Those who oppose His will are lost, but those who obey His will are redeemed (Hebrews 5:8-9).

### **CONCLUSION**

Improper desire, when allowed to run its course in league with Satan, seduces the will of man and leads to his impurity. Christians must never dally with temptations or entertain improper desires, for such usually translate into action (cf. Matthew 5:28).

Early Christians were the "firstfruits" of redemption and thus their means of salvation and ours is the same. For the firstfruits of the harvest, under Judaism, were a pledge of the fuller harvest to follow (Leviticus 23:10; Deuteronomy 26:2). Whatever was required of New Testament peoples in order to be saved, is in order for all people, for all time (Acts 2:38).

### **STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. What significant change occurred in James' use of the term "temptation" [*peirodzo*] in James 1:13?
2. Satan solicited Jesus to do evil (Matthew 4:1-11). What three avenues of evil seduction did Satan use? See Genesis 3 and 1 John 2:15-17.
3. How difficult is it for the proud, human mind to recognize and admit its own failure?

4. What does James insist should never be said about God?
  5. What is the offspring of sin?
  6. Sin starts where and proceeds to what?
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## PRACTICING RIGHTEOUSNESS: JAMES 1:19-27

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### EXPOSITION

One who has been begotten through the “word of truth” (James 1:18) should learn how to behave oneself, because he knows he has received an awesome gift from God (James 1:19-27). First one should realize that he is a beloved brother and must be “swift to hear” [from *tachus*; cf. a tachometer]; i.e, have a ready disposition to heed God’s Word (James 1:19a). Second, one must be “slow to speak,” which does not mean being dull of speech, but holding one’s tongue to be used at the proper time (James 1:19b). Third, one must be “slow to wrath” (James 1:19c). Uncontrolled anger is never a Christian characteristic. The reason for the foregoing concepts is that man’s inability to control himself leads to being filled with such bitterness, prejudice, and hatred that man cannot properly hear God’s Word and, therefore, cannot “work the righteousness of God” (James 1:20).

One who “works righteousness” is keeping God’s commandments (Psalm 119:172; 1 John 2:29; 3:7). [Righteousness is the legal justification from God, based on Christ’s sacrifice and man’s acceptance of, and obedience to, God’s commands.]

But, uncontrolled actions make such obedience nigh impossible: “Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21). One who has been declared righteous by God (that is one who is justified, not perfect), must learn how to behave himself by getting rid of *filthiness* [sins of the flesh, Galatians 5:19-21] and “superfluity of naughtiness,” KJV; “overflowing of wickedness,” ASV. Any abundance

of evil has no place in the Christian's life. By way of illustration, one who clears away the cobwebs, but does not eliminate the spider, will have more cobwebs. The Christian must completely strip himself of any semblance of sin. How can this be done?

“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. 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: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man is blessed in his deed” (James 1:22-25).

It is probably easier to say one will not sin, than it is not to sin. The key to overcoming filthiness and overflowing wickedness is, according to the inspired James, becoming a diligent student of the law of liberty or New Testament law of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:21), and then doing the work that the law of Christ demands. Such actions involve the heart and are not mere mechanical works. A faithful Christian produces results because he is God's “workmanship, created unto good works” (Ephesians 2:10). [The term, *workmanship*, is from *poetai*, (compare poem).] The Christian's life is in harmony with God and thus a beautiful, creative existence occurs. The one who imagines that he can derive benefit from the Word of God simply by hearing it is cheating oneself (1 John 2:4). ***There are two parts to the law of Christ: the first is believing it; the second is behaving it*** (Galatians 6:2; Romans 8:1-2; James 2:12).

James 2:20-25 is the inspired commentary on being *swift to hear and slow to speak* from verse nineteen. But James 2:26 is directed toward the external devotion

of a Christian. One unable to control oneself is of little benefit to mankind and is unacceptable to God.

Pure religion requires outward effort and inward control (James 1:27). This is the definition by James of the clean, uncontaminated actions of the true Christian. His faith is in Christ, but his *religion* is what he does and what he is. [Compare Matthew 5:8 and Micah 6:8 for more information on this concept.]

The *fatherless* are orphans, but the term includes all without a spiritual guide; see John 14:16-18. [Note here that what one can do for orphans can be done for both widows and orphans by the church; 1 Timothy 5:16]. To be *unspotted from the world* is to live a pure life (2 Corinthian 7:1).

### CONCLUSION

God has three “traffic signs” for Christians to obey. One is to “speed up” to hear; “slow down” when speaking; and “speeding up” in doing. The Christian must put away all filthiness and be a doer of the work God has assigned. The Christian’s pure religion is to take care of others and to keep himself free from worldly sins.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are God’s three “traffic signs” and what does each mean (James 1:19)?
2. What is *righteousness* and why does man’s *wrath* not *work it* (James 1:20)?
3. What is to be set apart (James 1:21a)?
4. What is to be received (James 1:21b)?
5. What is one to be doing (James 1:22-26)?
6. What is pure religion (James 1:27)?
7. Can the church support widows and orphans?

## A BAD HABIT: JAMES 2:1-5

*Keith A. Mosher, Sr.*

### EXPOSITION

The King James Version at James 2:1 reads: "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons." The original, however is the stronger exhortation of "quit having the habit" of prejudice toward persons. James' style seems to have been that when he started a new topic, he began with "my brethren" (cf. James 1:19; 2:5, 14; 3:1; 5:7). At this point it is a friendly greeting about a critical issue.

The phrase, *the faith*, is a reference to the entirety of the New Testament's teaching, so James was commanding that the whole of the Christian system demanded respect for all persons. [See Galatians 3:23-29 for a study of *the faith* and where that system is located.] Woods paraphrased the idea as: "*Don't try to be a Christian and a hypocrite at the same time*" (*Commentary 105*). Jesus position of glory is a reference to His return to heaven, yet the faith is still His.

James' illustration pictures one entering the *assembly* (Greek, *sunagogue* or *synagogue* or *gathering together place*), who is obviously wealthy [a gold-ringed man] along with a *ptochos* or *beggar*, translated *poor man* (James 2:2). Note the huge contrast in the two visitors. [The most coveted place in the ancient synagogue, for a Jew, was near the end of the building, facing Jerusalem, and in close proximity to the cupboard where the scrolls were kept.] Note the veiled contempt for the financially poor visitor in the words of the usher, for who would ever ask a newcomer to **stand** all through worship services (James 2:3)? The poor man's clothing is said to be *en*

*ruparai esthete*; meaning cheap, and perhaps dirty. While in contrast, the rich man has *en esthai lampria* [*brilliantly colored*] clothing. Both visitors, however, stand in the same spiritual condition before God.

Anyone who makes distinctions based on externals (a divided mindset) is doubting the Lord's teaching on loving one's neighbor (Matthew 22:39) and, possibly, is prejudiced by the outward appearance itself (James 2:4a). Such a person becomes another's judge, and does so as one with evil thoughts (James 2:4b). The term *judges* is from *dialogismos*, which is a legal term, and the meaning is that the usher had become a court of conflict and had already decided on the case of rich versus poor. What a poor judge he was, and we would be, too, if we thought as he did.

The greater number in the early church were poor (James 1:5; cf. Luke 6:20; 1 Corinthians 1:26-30). If one could *hear* what James wrote at this point, one would probably have been shaken by a shout, for the half-brother of the Lord wrote **Hearken!** One rich in faith is pleasing to God, for neither riches nor poverty are blessings in themselves. Those called by the gospel who obey it are in the kingdom and in favor with the Lord.

### CONCLUSION

Christians are commanded against prejudice which fiat implies that the possibility of respect of persons can exist among the "saved." Partiality is double-minded and at its base, hypocritical. Only the obedient are in favor with God, and they are the ones who practice true love of their fellow-man.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is "the faith?"
  2. Why is the Lord spoken of as the "Lord of glory?"
  3. Could the poor man have been a beggar?
  4. How did the usher show his contempt for the poor man
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## RESPECT OF PERSONS IS A SIN (JAMES 2:6-9)

*Keith A. Mosher, Sr.*

### INTRODUCTION

When he was a student, the famous Indian leader, Mahatma Ghandi, considered becoming a Christian. He read the Gospels and was moved by them. It seemed to him that Christianity offered a solution to the caste system that plagued the people of India. One Sunday, he went to a local church. He had decided to see the pastor and ask for instruction on the way of salvation. But when he entered the church, which consisted of white people, the ushers refused to give him a seat. They told him to go and worship with his own people. He left and never went back. "If Christians have caste differences also," he said, "I might as well remain a Hindu" [from *Our Daily Bread*, February, 1979;] (quoted in bible.org/series/8; 1).

The above, tragic account, illustrates James' admonitions found in what we call chapter two, verses 6-9, which section is forever attached to the commands found in James 2:1-5 (KJV). James, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, focused on partiality, favoritism, and/or racism as types of prejudices that should never be practiced by God's children. To favor some and disregard others, based on externals, are terrible sins that have plagued the church since she started on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-47). The sin of racism stems from pride, and haughtiness is the source of some of the corruption practiced even by famous "church" leaders called popes (see E. R. Chamberlin, *The Bad Popes*). [Those popes did favors for those who could pay the most!]

But, the popes are not the only ones who have shown partiality. One tenet of the evangelical churches is called "***the homogenous unit principle***" (bible.org 2). It is a practice based on the concept that people like to worship with their own kind. So, evangelical "pastors" are taught to target outreach according to demographic preferences (Ibid.). In other words, reach out to people who are like you; or, shape

your congregations according to consumer wants so that folks feel “comfortable” when they come (Ibid.).

The Bible doctrine is that in the church: “There is neither Jew nor Greek there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ” (Gal. 3:28). In the text assigned from James chapter two the sin of partiality is said to be a violation of the “royal law” (Jam. 2:8). It is the case, then, that prejudicial feelings are serious matters and need attention from all children of God. No Christian should ever be involved in saying who can or cannot attend the services where he worships, when such decisions are based solely on the color of skin, or economic status, or ethnic background.

To facilitate this brief study, the text of James 2:6-9 will be examined, and then some applications will be made. I must, in order to do justice to this text, draw in some thoughts here from James 2:1-5.

### **PREJUDICE IN THE FAMILY OF GOD (JAMES 2:1-9)!**

The King James Version at James 2:1 is: “have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with respect of persons.” The original reads as a strong command: “do not hold the faith. . .with partiality” (enduringword.com). The beautiful New Testament system of faith has no place for prejudicial judgments, as God does not judge in such a way (Deu. 10:17; Acts 10:34). As one reads James chapter two, one should keep in mind that this half-brother of the Lord was writing in an age when there was hatred based on class, ethnicity, nationality, and religious background. People were classified as Jew, Gentile, slave, free, rich, poor, Greek or barbarian, etcetera. Jesus came to break down all such barriers (Eph. 2:14-15). In

regard to James 2:2-5 and the illustration there about a beggar and a rich man, and the veiled contempt of the usher who moved the beggar in preference to the well-dressed rich man, Woods wrote:

In view of this, what must our Lord think of that attitude of mind and heart which often prompts people; themselves alleged worshippers before the throne of Grace and in need of such mercy, to array themselves in the most ostentatious garments possible, and to parade down aisles of New Testament church buildings like peacocks, to the admiration of some and the envy of others (109).

There can be no considerations of material differences among Christians, for one becomes a doubter of the very Lord of glory and His teaching that forbade such (Jam. 2:4). In fact, the latter verse indicates that one who tried to take the place of God in judgment of another, based on external differences, ended up being one filled with evil! [It would be good, here, to stop and think about cliques, gossip, church "bosses," and all other forms of partiality easily observed in too many congregations.]

Prejudice is an illogical, inconsistent attitude (Jam. 2:6). One who cares more for appearance than the substance of another has left God, for God looks on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). Partiality is improper thinking in that it misunderstands who is important to God and who is not. James' rich man was thought to be more deserving of being served than the beggar was (Jam. 2:3). There may also be a component of selfishness in prejudice. Was the rich man favored over the beggar because the one seating the wealthy expected to get something?

Man's prejudice never agrees with God's heart (Jam. 2:5). God is not partial to the rich or poor, but all are treated alike. In fact some wealth can be an obstacle to salvation (Mat. 19:24), but rich in faith is pleasing to God. One wrote: "The rich man

may trust Him, but the poor man must" (enduringword.com). When John the baptizer was in prison, he asked his followers to question Jesus about His messiahship (Mat. 11:2-3). Jesus told those disciples to tell John that "the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Mat. 11:5b). It is the case that throughout the centuries, the poor have more often responded to the gospel than do the rich. In fact, Jesus was born in poverty and lived in such (Mat. 8:20). I wonder if He were to enter our assemblies, as he appeared then, how many today would be ashamed of his dusty feet, and road-weary clothing? Paul admonished the Corinthian brethren with: "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called" (1 Cor. 1:26).

Those in that ancient assembly, described by James, were said to "despise the poor" (Jam. 2:6). Men in debt, then, could be taken to court and sold into slavery. To dishonor a beggar, and honor a rich man, is thus described as hatred, and inconsistent, for the rich often took the poor to law. The psalmist insisted that God had: "prepared of thy goodness for the poor" (Psa. 68:10). And that ancient writer added: "For the Lord heareth the poor, and despiseth not his prisoners" (Psa. 69:33). [The term, *draw*, in verse 6 of James 2, means to be *dragged*!]

Prejudice is also said to be blasphemy against the very term, Christian, and, thus, against Christ (Jam. 2:7). Was the rich man who entered that ancient assembly a Christian? If so, his participation in the adjusted seating was evil, and the very fact that he wore the name Christian became blasphemy against the Lord of glory! The new name pronounced on one at baptism (Isa. 62:1-2; Acts 11:26; 1 Pet. 4:16) would have to be regarded as shameful, if worn by a prejudiced member.

It is also the case that partiality is, at its foundation, a sin against love (Jam. 2:8; cf. Lev. 19:18; Mat. 22:30; Mat. 7:12). Those assembled, in James' day, might well have said: "But James, we are loving the rich man." James would, no doubt, have responded: "Yes, but your actions show that you hate the poor man!" Even the ancient Mosaic code contained the following:

Thou shalt not wrest judgment: thou shalt not respect persons; neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous. That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee (Deu. 16:19-20).

Complete obedience to the law of Moses resulted in one's being godly and righteous, which is the fulfillment of the royal law (Mat. 7:12; cf. Luke 1:6). To call someone a street name is racist and unrighteous, and such practice is what I call "spiritual insanity." "But if ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors" (Jam. 2:9). Woods insisted that: "Moreover, it was not simply or merely a 'fault' in which they were engaging; it is by James designated as sin. . .they were not only committing acts of sin, they were in sin" (122).

### **IMPARTIAL FAITH**

James' admonition is that a Christian should keep his faith without partiality. Racism, especially what is called systemic racism, is a hot topic today. God has already designated prejudice as sin and instructed His children not to base their judgments on appearances. Too many judge others on how they look, how they talk, how they dress, how much money they have, what sort of car they drive; well I could list a number of other things, but all of them would be externals. From "expositorysermonsoutlines.com" I read the following:

An African man was sitting next to an Englishman at a conference dinner. When the food was served the Englishman leaned over and said, "Eat! Yum, yum, yum, Good, eh?" When the drinks were served, he turned to the African again and said, "Drink! Slurp, slurp, slurp, Good, eh?" After the meal the speaker was invited to the platform. To the Englishman's surprise, the African man, who had two PH.D.s and spoke impeccable Oxford English; who had represented his country in the U.N. for three years, got to his feet, went to the platform, and delivered the message. When he had finished, he went and sat down, and as he did, he leaned over to the Englishman and said, "Talk! Blah, blah, blah, Good, eh?"

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### **CHURCH: A CASTE-FREE ZONE**

There is absolutely no place for partiality in any congregation of God's people. All are to be accepted unconditionally. But, are they?

I met Waldo because of a campaign going on at the congregation where I was the preacher. He was 72 years old and had been contacted by two young ladies who were out knocking on doors. After a study, Waldo was baptized into Christ. I visited him on three occasions that week, continued to study with him and learned that he was looking forward to his first time to worship with the saints on the following Sunday. His house, because of his age and desperate poverty, was extremely filthy and uninviting. Waldo had a grandson, who lived with him, and the boy asked me if I would take him fishing. I did, on that Saturday, and the lad brought cockroaches from the house to use for bait! Waldo and the boy, who was part native-American, came on Sunday. The boy had on the same clothes he had worn when we fished, but Waldo had on his best clothing—a pair of bib-farmer jeans, a greyish white shirt, and a dusty black sports coat. Sadly, an elder told Waldo that he was not well dressed for worship. Waldo left that day, and despite my urgent pleading, never again darkened the door of that congregation or any other. His body, today, lies behind a Methodist building.

Jesus intended for us to be one (John 17:20-21; Eph. 2:14). Are we?

### **GOD'S NATURE: IMPARTIAL**

Moses, by inspiration, wrote: "For the Lord your God *is* God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward" (Deu. 10:17). God's nature is completely impartial, and He is not impressed by our looks, money, intelligence, or academic standing. Moses added the

strong admonition that: "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment; thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor" (Lev. 19:15). Evidently, when that rich man entered that assembly about which James wrote, it was an unusual event and excited the one doing the seating (Jam. 2:2-3). Why? When it comes to being righteous, rich nor poor gets a free pass (Gal. 6:5), but when it comes to a person's externals, all must be treated as God would treat them, for He is not partial.

### **HOW DO WE MEASURE OTHERS**

Suppose someone on a construction site were to sabotage the tape measures of each worker so that the tool caused them to make the building too small or too large. When the measuring stick is too short, or too long, bad things will happen. What measuring stick should Christians use in treatment of others? James said all should be "measured" by the royal law of love (Jam. 2:8-9).

Gibson noted concerning the royal law: "As being the most excellent of all laws; as we might call it the sovereign principle of all our conduct" (Pulpit 29). Gibson added that the royal law of love: "Received the sanction of the King himself (Matt. 22:39; Luke x. 26-28)" (Ibid.). Woods summarized this concept with: "He who loves God supremely will discharge fully his duty to God; he who loves his neighbor as himself will, in similar fashion, perform every obligation owed to his neighbor" (120).

When instructing Judah about the nature of God, Isaiah wrote of His saying: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord" (55:9). Such being the case, it requires study, discipline, and application for

the child of God to learn how God treats everyone, and how the child of God has to think in a loving way about all persons on the face of the earth.

### **PARTIALITY IS WRONG BECAUSE IT USURPS GOD'S PLACE**

James wrote to brethren (Jam. 2:1), not to the world. Those Christian folks had been scattered everywhere by other people (Jam. 1:1). Yet, they were not to use their suffering as an excuse to be prejudiced. Only Deity is in position to judge the hearts of men, and no one has the ability or the right to take God's place. No one can take the place of the "Lord of glory" (Jam. 2:1), for He is the final and only judge of the souls of men (John 5:22). [It is humanly possible to judge actions, but never appearances nor hearts; John 7:24.] To make a difference in treatment of others, based on their looks, is sin, for it is taking the place that only God occupies.

Everything we are and have come from God (Acts 17:25; 1 Cor. 4:7). So, when we judge men on account of skin color, wealth, or status, we rob the Lord of His glory (Jam. 2:1). It is the case that we should give honor to whom honor is due (Rom. 12:7), but honor toward Christ and honor toward men for their actions are two different things. God judges men by their works (Mat. 25:31ff.), and so can His children. But prejudiced minds sometimes even ignore what another does, and pronounce a decision upon a whole segment of society without evidence to back up the pronouncement. ***James was not teaching that the poor are always good and the rich are always bad. But he did intend to instruct that any judgments made on outward factors alone are wrong.***

### **ONLY GOD CAN CHOOSE**

Note, once again, James 2:5—“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?” The choosing of God is of those who are called to Him, by the gospel of Christ and who obey the calling (2 The. 2:14; Rom. 1:16). What is the difference, at that point, between any one of God’s children? Why do we make differences and attend certain preferred congregations? What motivation drives us to “seek our own kind?” [I am personally aware of missionaries in Africa who will not worship with the native population!]

Pure religion cares for those in need (Jam. 1:27; cf. Isa. 22:15-16; Eze. 22:7; Amos 4:1; 5:15, 24). Any preferential treatment that would cause one to overlook those in need is sin. The very name of Christ, sadly, is often blasphemed by prejudice, as is the very reputation of the church of Christ (Jam. 2:7). All who are hungry, thirsty, without clothing, sick, or in prison, regardless of human condition, are the responsibilities of all of God’s children, who are able to help (Mat. 25:31-46).

### **CONCLUSION**

There are numerous ways one can commit the sin of prejudice about which James wrote. I heard a gospel preacher tell an off-color joke in front of other preachers. I heard a Christian laugh at how old someone’s car was in comparison to all the beauties in the parking lot. I have, several times, heard whispering about the sins of others. I have heard people being told about their supposed poor dress. I heard about a preacher who was going to sue the church for exposing his adultery. I have other examples, but the foregoing are enough; as James put it: “But if ye have

respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors”  
(2:7).

Partiality is a sin against love (Mat. 7:12). One does not obey the portion of  
God’s law on baptism and then ignore His law of love (Jam. 2:10).

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### **STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. What is the major crisis in relationships with persons of differing cultures, skin color, etcetera?
2. Is God partial?
3. What is impartial faith?
4. In the final analysis, Who is usurped by prejudice?

## LAW OR "GRACE ALONE?" OR BOTH? JAMES 2:10-26

*Keith A. Mosher, Sr.*

### EXPOSITION

By referencing the old Mosaic law (James 2:10-11), James explicitly indicated that one trying to be saved by law keeping alone would have to be perfect, for the law of Moses could not justify (Galatians 2:16; Hebrews 10:1-4). Yet, one must actuate one's faith under the New Testament of Christ or that one has "faith alone" (James 2:11-26). Under the Old Testament, one stood condemned by violating any portion of it, but under the law of Christ, justification is a reality because of His blood sacrifice and so: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh [the old law, K.M.], but after the Spirit [the New Testament commands, K.M.] (Romans 8:1). Until the cross, God forgave men in prospect of it (Romans 4:3). Now, God justifies the obedient while looking back at the sacrifice of His Son (James 2:12-13; cf. Romans 3:24-31).

The term, *faith*, used by James, is a reference to one's personal belief and one not doing what God commanded is dead spiritually (James 2:15-17). One's repentance is *faith deciding*; one's confession of Christ as deity is *faith speaking*; and one's obedience in baptism is *faith acting*.

Many have failed to recognize that there are at least four kinds of *works* mentioned in the Bible. There are the works or sins of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). There are the works of the law of Moses (Galatians 2:16). There are works men do, thinking they are pleasing God (Matthew 7:21-23; Ephesians 2:8-9). There are

works assigned by God which complete one's faith (John 6:28-29). Therefore, what possible benefit could be derived from an inactive faith?

There is no way to show one's faith without works (James 2:18-19). Even the demons had *faith only* (Matthew 8:29; Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34; Acts 16:17). The problem is that one must want to know that "faith without works is dead" (James 2:20). The *vain* or *kene* man is devoid of such a desire to know.

James illustrated his point with Abraham and Rahab (James 2:21-25). Some have argued against works by insisting that Abraham and Rahab were only justified in the sight of men, and that is what James meant. But, God chose an isolated place for Abraham to offer Isaac, and Abraham decided to obey God (Hebrews 11:17-19). Rahab was condemned by her peers, because she lied to them to save the Israeli spies (Joshua 2:1-24). One who puts his faith into action by obeying God is Jehovah's *friend!* Faith without works is as dead as a human without his spirit (James 2:26).

### CONCLUSION

The principals James taught are applicable to saints and sinners alike. No one can insist that he has faith without proving such in obedience to God's commands (Matthew 7:21). Church members who are inactive, and sinners who refuse to obey the gospel are all lost. Dear reader, show me your faith.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the "perfect law of liberty"?
2. What does mercy beget?
3. What kind of works did James have in mind?
4. What benefit can be gained by an inactive faith?
5. See Matthew 9:2. How would you show your faith without doing what God said to do?
6. Do demons, and thus the devil, himself, believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Are they saved?

7. Was Abraham justified before God or man?
  8. What is dead faith?
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## **THE TEACHER AND HIS TONGUE: JAMES 3:1-5**

*Keith A. Mosher, Sr.*

### **EXPOSITION**

Other than Solomon, James wrote more on the proper and improper uses of the human tongue than any other Bible writer did. James 3:1-5 is, in the context, a study of public teachers and their speaking habits. James 3:1a has, in the King James Version, "My brethren, be not many masters" and the Greek shows that this is really a command and reads: "stop becoming many teachers." Why would James not want some Christians to teach? The Hebrews writer chastised his readers for not being able to teach (Hebrews 5:12-14)! Some in James day, it may be supposed, were wanting to be public teachers, but had no training to do so, and must not have realized the tremendous responsibility of being an instructor in God's Word and the immeasurable impression left on students by a teacher.

Some should not be teachers (1 Timothy 2:7). The most serious matter on earth is the proclamation of the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:16; 1 Timothy 4:16; 1:3-4). A teacher of God's Word must be diligent (1 Timothy 2:15). Such a teacher must be a complete example to his students (1 Timothy 4:12). However, James indicated the eternal reason one should be well-prepared and serious about public teaching is that: "we shall receive the greater condemnation" (James 3:1b). Not all Christians are public teachers, nor are they qualified, but there are a lot of works to be done in the church without being a public Bible teacher. And, one who publically expounds on God's Word will be separated at judgment and held to a stricter standard from others. [Note also Romans 2:21 and Matthew 15:14].

In many things all of us stumble (James 3:2), for man is free to obey or disobey God (John 5:40). Christ died for all men, and all men can repent (Hebrews 2:9; Romans 5:6-8; Hebrews 5:8-9; Revelation 2:4-5; Acts 17:30-31). Also, to know God leads to eternal life in heaven (John 17:3). Yet, multitudes forget God (Jeremiah 2:32) and those who forget are turned into hell (Psalm 9:17). The people of God have their names written in heaven, but most names will be missing from God's book of life (Philippians 4:3; Exodus 32:33; Revelation 20:15). God has, however, provided for those who are His children, but do stumble (1 John 1:7-10).

The tongue is hard to control and sets on fire numerous problems in life (James 3:3-5). James used two illustrations of small things that control huge things, in order to indicate that even though the tongue is small, it can cause huge difficulties. The large horse can be controlled by a bit in its mouth, and the enormous ship can be guided by a small helm, and the tongue is little in comparison to what its improper use can cause. There are some words we may have to eat, so we should be careful in our speech, especially if we are public teachers.

### **SOME SINFUL USES OF THE TONGUE**

The first sinful use of the tongue on my list is *lying* (cf. Genesis 3:1-4 and the devil's lie). Abraham lied about his wife (Genesis 12 and 22) and his son Isaac lied about himself (Genesis 26). A younger prophet of God was lied to by an older prophet, and the younger died because of the lie (1 Kings 12 and 13). Ananias' and Sapphira's lies would have undermined apostolic authority (Acts 5). Some ways of lying are insincere flattery; cheating on a test; falsifying income tax returns; excuses for not attending worship; selling an automobile without all the facts; failing to keep

one's word (Ecclesiastes 5:2-6). God hates lying (Proverbs 6:16-18; 12:22; 26:28; Psalm 52:1-7; Ephesians 4:25; Revelation 21:8).

Second on my list of sinful uses of the tongue is **profanity**. This is using corrupt or offensive language and/or referring to sacred things in an irreverent manner. There are many ways to use God's name in vain (Exodus 20:7; Matthew 12:36-37; Ephesians 4:29; Titus 2:7-8; James 3:9-10).

Third on the list is **talebearing**. This is one who sows discord and who usually begins with, "have you heard?" See Leviticus 19:16; Proverbs 11:13; 18:8; 26:20; and 1 Timothy 5:11-13.

In the fourth place I mention **angry words**. Such uses of the tongue break friendships and hearts. See Ephesians 4:26.

A fifth sinful use of the tongue would be **backbiting**. This sin is committed by speaking against someone in a secret manner (Romans 1:30).

**Bragging** is connected to the sin of pride.

### SOME GOOD USES OF THE TONGUE

One can **preach the truth** (1 Corinthians 9:16; 2 Timothy 4:1-2) or teach someone the gospel in private (Romans 10:17; Mark 16:15-16). One Christian can **encourage** or exhort another (Hebrews 12:12; 1 Thessalonians 4:18). One can **defend one's faith** (1 Peter 3:15). One can **confess the name of Christ** (Matthew 16:16; Acts 8:37). One can **sing spiritual songs** (Colossians 3:16). One can **confess sin** (James 5:16; 1 John 1:9) and one can **approach God in prayer** (Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).

### CONCLUSION

The public teacher must be a qualified one, for greater judgment is in store for such. The tongue, unable to be tamed, must be under restraint and the sinful uses of it curtailed. There are many good things that can proceed from the tongue, but it must be under constant control.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Was James trying to discourage anyone from being a public teacher?
2. What is the most serious matter on earth?
3. A teacher must be the example of whom? Give the passage.
4. What reason did James give for being a qualified public teacher?
5. What are two other consequences for public teachers? See Matthew 15:14 and 1 Corinthians 9:16.
6. For whom did Christ die? Why, then, can Christians still stumble?
7. What happens to those who forget God?
8. The people of God have their names written where?
9. Can the tongue be tamed? If not, then what should be done with it?
10. What are some sinful and some good uses of the tongue?

## THE TONGUE IS A FIRE: JAMES 3:6-12

*Keith A. Mosher, Sr.*

### EXPOSITION

James wrote of the devastating effects of fire (James 3:5) and then exclaimed that this is what the tongue is when out of control (James 3:6). The tongue can **defile** the whole body. [The term *defileth* is from *spilo* which means to spot or to stain.] The phrase *course of nature* in the King James Version is *wheel of nature* in the American Standard Version, where the margin has *wheel of birth*. Woods wrote: "Birth is that which ushers us into life; and the "wheel of birth" may well signify our entire existence, beginning with birth and ending with death" (*Commentary 163*). It is the case then that James was illustrating the effects on the whole of one's life when the tongue is not controlled.

The term, *kind* in James 3:7 is from *phusis* that means *nature*. All of brute nature has been brought under man's dominion (Genesis 1:27-28; 9:1-2). The beasts are four-footed, and the birds are flying things, and bugs and snakes are crawling things, and the fish are in the waters and all have been *dedamastai* [tamed, perfect tense, meaning they have been and still can be]. Man can control a bull, but has problems with his little tongue (James 3:8).

The tongue, as noted in the last study, has good and bad uses (James 3:9). The highest use of the tongue is to *bless* [*eulogoumen*, to speak well of] God, and the worst use is to *curse* [*kataraoimai*, a habitual habit is indicated] men. The one who would curse men thinks of himself as "occupying a higher position than other men" [*Commentary 173*]. The term, *kataraoimai* is composed from two Greek words, *kata*

[meaning *down*] and *ara* [*a prayer*]. One who would ask God to bring evil upon another is using his tongue in the most horrible of ways. Again, to use one's tongue in an inconsistent manner is sinful (James 3:10).

James' illustrations are about water fountains and olive and fig trees (James 3:11-12). That is, nothing in nature is so inconsistent, so how is it that man uses his tongue both to bless and to curse? Woods wrote: "The lesson is that a thing must produce according to its own nature; and if blessings and curses appear to come from the same mouth, there is something seriously wrong" (*Commentary 178*).

### CONCLUSION

The hardest thing in the human body to control is the tongue, and it is controlled by our thoughts (Matthew 15:19). There are terrible consequences to the improper use of the tongue, both in this life and in that to come. Many are hurt, discourage, disappointed, and destroyed by the words of another. Christianity is a practical way of life, and those who will be its most effective teachers work hard on controlling their speeches. Man's inconsistent use of his tongue is so peculiar that its like is not found anywhere else in nature.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are the consequences of the improper use of the tongue?
2. What did James mean by "the course of nature?"
3. The fire that results from misusing the tongue is comparable to what fire?
4. How much of nature has man tamed?
5. The tongue can never be what? Is there a temporary control?
6. What is the greatest use of the tongue?
7. What is the worst use of the tongue?
8. Is there an evil prayer?
9. Is there anything in nature that compares to the inconsistent tongue use?
10. How are you doing in controlling your speech?

## HEAVEN'S WISDOM: JAMES 3:13-18

*Keith A. Mosher, Sr.*

### EXPOSITION

In writing about Bible teachers, James insisted that they be qualified and in some control of their tongues (James 3:1-12). James then asked: "Who is wise and understanding among you" (James 3:13a)? Teachers are to be wise, understanding, and knowledgeable (cf. Deuteronomy 1:13; 4:6). Knowledge comes from study (2 Timothy 2:15), but wisdom is from God (James 1:5). Woods insisted that: "Knowledge is the possession of facts; wisdom is their proper application" (*Commentary 181*). [There is an addendum at the end of this booklet on man's wisdom as it differs from God's.]

Proof positive that the Christian has been acquiring knowledge and wisdom is that he can "show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom" (James 3:13b). The word, *conversation*, meant *one's life* when the King James Version was translated in 1611, so James meant that a Christian's life should be an example of his teaching (cf. 1 Timothy 4:12). The terms *meekness of wisdom* are a reflection from Jesus who was "meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29).

Note now James 3:14a. The opposite of a good life is one filled with "bitter envying" [*zelon pikron*, jealous bitterness], because one wants what the other has and believes he deserves such a thing or reward more than the one who has it; feelings of superiority over another never came from God.

Another opposite of the proper Christian life is one full of "strife in your hearts" (James 3:14b). The latter phrase is descriptive of one who resorts to evil

measures to accomplish one's desires. [The term translated strife is from eritheian, the root of which implies the condition of heart in which evil arises; the basic character of which is selfishness.] One who holds to the latter, lustful thoughts and actions was admonished by James to "glory not and lie not against the truth" (James 3:14c). Christians are forbidden to gloat over someone else's problems because of some supposed superiority, and are said to be false to the truth that comes from God. Bitter envying and strife make one's façade of Christianity into a virtual lie!

Worldly strife and bitterness do not originate in heaven (James 3:15a). Thus, one who is trying to get his spiritual motives right is approaching godly wisdom. The phrase *this wisdom* refers to what is recorded in verse fourteen as envy from a bitter heart, and the tense in the original means that worldly wisdom does not have to be a constant, but the wisdom from God is. Woods claimed that worldly wisdom "creates factions and parties in the church that cannot come from God" (*Commentary 186*). The true character of worldly wisdom is "earthly, sensual, devilish" (James 3:15b). Bitter envy and strife originate on earth and involve base motives and the very characteristics of the devil! Christians must separate themselves from this secular wisdom (Colossians 3:1-2; 1 John 2:15-17; James 4:4; 2 Corinthians 6:16-17).

The consequences of following the world are "confusion and every evil deed" (James 3:16; cf. 1 Corinthians 3:3). States of disorder and mental disturbance are byproducts of earthly, sensual, and devilish attitudes and always lead to confusion in the church and in individuals. Truth will not split a congregation, but a sensual, devilish teacher can. God is never the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33), therefore any "wisdom" that produces tumult cannot be from God. Woods added:

“Under such circumstances, those thus possessed [of earthly wisdom, K.M.] lose all sense of proper values, and resort to whatever is necessary in order to achieve their factious designs” (*Commentary 189*). [The diligent student will remember that Christ is the wisdom of God, and was never sensual in His teaching (1 Corinthians 1:30).]

God’s wisdom is first pure (James 3:17a; cf. Matthew 5:8; Proverbs 2:1-6). In the absence of pure doctrine there can be no peace between brethren, for peace must be preceded by purity. Then, after pure teaching, God’s wisdom can finally lead to peace (James 3:17b). That is, such wisdom is peaceable because it is pure. The implication from James is that it is impossible for a divisive spirit to issue from a pure heart (cf. Matthew 5:9). The wisdom from above is also gentle (James 3:17c). The word *gentle* comes from *eikos* and means reasonable and fair in dealing with others. God’s wisdom is also *easily entreated* (James 3:17d). One holding to God’s wisdom is approachable and willing to consider another’s point of view. The constant result of such pure, peaceable, gentle, considerate wisdom is that such are “full of mercy and good fruits” (James 3:17e; cf. Galatians 5:22-23). Finally, God’s wisdom is never partial (prejudiced; see James chapter two) or hypocritical (James 3:17f; cf. Titus 1:2; Romans 12:9).

God’s people can only “sow righteousness” in peace (James 3:18). Righteousness is always connected to keeping God’s commandments (Psalm 119:172). Haranguing, forceful opinions, and superiority complexes are never ways for God’s children to teach another or treat another. The biblical plea for unity needs no apology, but the motives from which one teaches such can be wrong.

## CONCLUSION

Unity and peace are most desirable conditions for all Christians. But, the disposition of heart that is guided by earthly, devilish wisdom, can never achieve the latter two goals. One can know facts, but the application of those facts requires using God's pure, peaceable, gentle, considerate wisdom that is never hypocritical.

### **STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. What is meant by the term, *conversation* in James 3:13?
2. Given the above meaning, what is the evidence for knowing that a teacher/Christian is applying God's wisdom to himself?
3. What are the attributes of earthly wisdom?
4. What are the consequences for congregations when earthly wisdom takes hold?
5. There are six attributes of heaven's wisdom listed in James 3:17. Define each and apply each one to Jesus who is God's Wisdom.
6. What is it that causes confusion in the church?
7. Does God ever cause confusion? (Give the passage for yes or no.)

## THE SOURCE OF CONFLICTS: 4:1-3

*Keith A. Mosher, Sr.*

### EXPOSITION

James had just explained what real peace is (James 3:17), but now transitioned to a study of “war” or conflict (James 4:1-3). He could have meant that conflicts occur between nations or maybe between churches, but it seems to me that he was continuing to write to individual members whose conflicts happen in their own relationships to God and a later statement from James will confirm this position. Applying James’ admonitions to each Christian would entail seeing that the “wars” and “fightings” are terms used figuratively to describe the inward conflicts through which God’s children often go. Of course, James analysis of the cause of conflicts would apply to nations and churches, but he would have left his context, if such had been his primary reason for writing what is recorded in verse one of James chapter four.

James’ question about the source of these inward “wars” starts with “whence” (James 4:1a). The Greek term is *pothen*, which is an adverb used interrogatively, and according to Bauer *pothen* means “from where from what source.” [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, University of Chicago Press, 680.* The edition I have is the rework of Arndt and Gingrich of the fifth edition of Bauer’s published in 1979 as a reprint.] The word, *war* is *polemos*, and denotes strife as an attitude that is controlling the individual. *Fightings* is from *mache*, which is the condition that produces the state of war in the individual and James was referencing a **continual** series of clashes or fightings.

The constant and real causes for inner turmoil are the evil desires or pleasures from the world that are sought by those who should not love that sphere of iniquity: “come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members” (James 4:1b). Not only did James confirm that he was writing about individuals, but he pinpointed the source of all unhappiness! Our own evil desires [*hedonon*, compare the English *hedonistic*], uncontrolled and never repented of produce the unhappy state seen in so many. [See James 1:13-15.] It is very hard to admit that I am causing my own problems and difficulties.

While reading James 4:2, one should keep in mind the lust of David for Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11-12) and Psalm 10:4, “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.” Salvation, that brings peace and joy, is not inquired after by the majority and so they have neither of the two, for they “have not because they ask not” (James 4:2b). If our chief concern is pleasure, we will never be at peace with ourselves. Evil desire will always lead to disappointment and conflict, and such lust is responsible for the most horrible crimes ever committed and causes many to trample others to get what is desired.

The result of such lust is: “Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it on your own lusts” (James 4:3). Why are our prayers often unanswered? Because they are selfish prayers wrote James! Job asked: “For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul? Will God hear his cry when trouble cometh upon him” (27:8-9)? The proverbs of Solomon contain the following: “Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer:

they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me (Proverbs 1:28). David exclaimed, and he would know because of Bathsheba: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18). Yet, the Lord proclaimed: "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you, seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Luke 11:9). What is the difference? Only the one operating on heaven's principles can expect to be heard in the sense of God's honoring his asking, seeking, and knocking, but the worldly one will never be granted such answers. In fact, God will never give us what we do not need. [The English word, *amiss*, is from *kakos* meaning bad or evil.]

### CONCLUSION

God's children must examine their motives with great care (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:5). It is, evidently, difficult to separate our own desires from what God would want us to ask in prayer. Those who work as Christian psychologists are well aware of the "stinking thinking" [actual psychological terminology] among their counselees. And by inspiration, James penned what the root cause of inner turmoil is and why it causes even God to turn a "deaf ear" to our requests.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What do you think was James' topic in 4:1; nations, groups, or individuals?
2. Why did you answer question one as you did?
3. What is the root cause of the destruction of peace in our lives?
4. What will God bestow, if we ask correctly?
5. What will God not do, if we ask *amiss*?
6. Have you every uttered a selfish prayer?

## AM I WITH GOD OR THE WORLD? JAMES 4:4-6

*Keith A. Mosher, Sr.*

### EXPOSITION

The English at James 4:4a has *adulterers and adulteresses*, but not in reference to sexual sins. The words are figurative, and, the term *adulterers* is not even found in the Westcott-Hort theory of transmission text called the American Standard Version. The word, *adulteresses*, does derive from a feminine form noun, *moichalides*, but the form does not indicate literal gender; so there remains here a figure of one's spiritual relationship to God in terms of a marriage. Woods noted: "The figure of marriage, to indicate the relationship of men to God, is of frequent usage in the Scripture (sic); and the Old Testament abounds with references to Israel as the *wife* (sic) of Jehovah. (Psalm 73; Isa 57; Ezek. 23; Hos. 3)" (*Commentary 208*). When one considers the terrible nature of physical adultery and compares it with spiritual adultery, the horribleness of the latter is better understood. The spiritual adulterer is cheating on God (cf. Romans 7:1-4)!

Note that any "friendship with the world is enmity with God" (James 4:4b). Thomas Guthrie wrote: "If you find yourself loving any pleasure better than your prayers; any book better than the Bible; any house better than the house of God; any table better than the Lord's table; any persons better than Christ; any indulgence better than the hope of heaven; be alarmed" (www. AZ quotes). Logically, every Christian should realize that this world is not his home, for he is to think of himself as a "stranger and pilgrim" here (1 Peter 2:11). Persons who find nothing wrong with participation in worldly matters have never learned to "approve the things that

are excellent" (Philippians 1:9) and do not have their minds trained to "discern good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14).

One who is a friend of the world is God's enemy (James 4:c). Such a participator in the world has lost his sense of spiritual values (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22). Everyone has to be somewhere, but many are where they ought not to be, so they are going find themselves where they do not want to be. Dear friend, do you not know that when you fall in love with the world, you have, biblically speaking, become a hater of God (Matthew 6:24; 1 John 5:19; John 14:30; 1 John 2:15-17; Ephesians 5:11, John 12:41-42; 2 Timothy 4:10)? [It is also the case that the word translated *in*, in the King James Version, is *maketh himself* in the American Standard Version, simply because the original seems to be in the middle voice of the verb, which would mean that the subject did this to himself by his actions. When one consorts with the world, he becomes God's enemy.]

The Holy Bible teaches that man's spirit tends to lust (James 4:5) is what I believe is the interpretation of the latter. Translation of this verse has given brethren some difficulties over the years, because of the punctuation in the original. The question is rhetorical, and demands an answer, and the American Standard Translators believed the term, spirit, to mean the Holy Spirit. How the pure Holy Spirit would lust to envy is beyond me, but this verse is used as a "proof-text" by the advocates of a literal, personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit always works through His message and never from the inside of people (Ephesians 3:16-17; 6:17). And, the Holy Spirit never "lusts to envy."

When man is humble enough to submit to God's Word, God ensures that He will give "more grace" to that one (James 4:6; cf. Romans 5:20). God's grace always outdistances the need, and is totally sufficient to meet the sin-problem of man (Romans 8:1-3). But, the latter facts do not allow for a continual life of sin (Romans 6:1-3). The proud are always God's enemy, but the humble are His friends (John 15:4; Proverbs 3:34).

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### **CONCLUSION**

Those who cannot resist worldly pleasures, and participation in them, are spiritual adulterers and adulteresses (James 4:4). They try to have two masters, and serve neither in full (Matthew 6:24). Also, those who love this world, more than they love God, have made themselves God's enemies. Only those humble enough to submit to God have accessed His saving grace (James 4:5-6; cf. Romans 5:1-10).

### **STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. Why did James employ the figure of adultery and apply such to his Christian readers?
2. How many passages can you find that refer to God's people as His wife or family?
3. Did James seem surprised that some did not seem to know that worldly friendship is spiritual adultery?
4. What does one lose by not discerning what is of the world and what is of God?
5. Do those in the world even enjoy one another, or not?
6. Who causes one to become God's enemy?
7. See Colossians 3:1-3 and Romans 6:4. How well are you living in Christian newness instead of the old worldliness?
8. What was James highest authority for his teachings (James 4:5-6)?
9. Who can receive all the grace needed to overcome the world?

## SUBMISSION TO GOD BRINGS EXULTATION TO MAN: JAMES 4:7-10

Keith A. Mosher, Sr.

### EXPOSITION

James admonished his readers to: "Submit yourselves therefore to God" (4:7a). The American Standard has "Be subject," and the Greek word translated submit or subject is *hupotagete*, and the meaning is *to place oneself under God's authority*. The root of the last part of *hupotasso* [root of *hpuotagete*] was used of military men who placed themselves under their leader. But, in James 4:6 the term *antitasso*, was used by James to mean that one who is not submissive to God has arrayed himself against God much the same way an army would go against its own leader. There are seven aorist imperatives in verses 7-10, all with a note of urgency and requiring immediate and forthright action. That is, that anything commanded in the verses could not be put away for another time (cf. 1 Peter 5:5-6). [The aorist tense implied a once for all-time submission and *hupotagete* implied that one chose to submit, K. M.]

The next imperative from James was to "Resist the devil" (James 4:7b). The word *resist* is from *antistete* meaning to *stand against* Satan. One must put on the whole armor of God to do this (Ephesians 6:10-13). Therefore, even here the term James used has a military concept in it (cf. 1 Peter 5:8; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15). The term translated *devil* is *diaboloí*, meaning *slanderer*. He is also called dragon, evil one, angel of the bottomless pit, the prince of this world, the prince of the powers of the air, the god of this world, Apollyon, Belial, Beelzebub, father of lies, etcetera. To

be armed against Satan, and then to stand against him, results in his fleeing (cf. Matthew 4:1-11).

The third imperative from James is to: “Draw nigh to God” (James 4:8:1a). God is not far away (Acts 17:27; Jeremiah 23:23-24; Deuteronomy 4:5-8; Philippians 4:5). As Ezra implied, the goal of king Solomon was to seek God and to stay close to Him, and then He would be found (1 Chronicles 28:9).

The fourth imperative was to: “Cleanse your hands, ye sinners” (James 4:8b). *Cleanse* is from *katharisate* [compare the English, *cathartic*], used here by James in a figurative way as did Isaiah (1:15-17.) Those unwilling to submit and draw close to God, and those failing to resist the devil, needed to go through a spiritual cleansing concerning his actions. [The figure of speech of cleansing the hands would be very familiar to the former Jewish James, for it was the prerequisite of a priest to wash his hands before entering into his duties (Exodus 30:20).] Note Psalm 26:6-7. To the Jews, soiled hands were a symbol of guilt (cf. Matthew 37:24; 2 Corinthians 6:17-18).

The fifth imperative is: “and purify your hearts, ye double-minded” (James 4:8c). The mind of the Christian must also be morally clean. The source of sin is the human mind (James 1:13-15; Matthew 15:16-20). The sixth imperative is parallel to purifying the mind and is: “Be afflicted and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness” (James 4:9). “Be afflicted” is from *talaiporesate* or *wretched*, and is in the middle voice, meaning one must do or feel affliction, mourning, and heaviness for himself. Such godly wretchedness leads to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10; Romans 2:4; Luke 22:54-62; Job 8:20-21).

The seventh and last imperative in this section from James is: “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord” (James 4:10). See 1 Peter 5:5 and Matthew 23:12. For the disciple of Christ, the way up is down, for the Lord did not teach the concept of “dog eat dog” as a lifestyle. There is a statue in the Louvres in Paris, France that is a standing imitation of Jesus. If one walks directly to the statue, the face looking back was made by the sculptor to appear to be very ugly to the one standing. There is a plaque on the statue that reads: “Get down on your knees.” If one obeys the sign, and then looks up to the face on the sculpture, the face is beautifully smiling down at the one kneeling. At this point, John 13:10-17 should be studied to remind all of us about how humble our Lord is.

The last phrase in James 4:10 is: “and he shall lift you up.” A literal reading would be, “and he shall exalt you,” for “lift you up” is from *hupsoo* or *height*; a *spiritual lifting*. David learned that the “sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psalm 51:17). To the penitent, it is high exultation to know that God forgives.

### **CONCLUSION**

The passage we know as James 4:7-10 has many urgent commands within its literary boundaries and some even count ten in the text. However, the idea is submission and penitence toward God, and those who do mourn over their sinful state will be exulted. It requires a humble heart to admit sin, and to correct it.

### **STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. How many commands do you find in James 4:7-10?
2. What is submission to God and how is it accomplished?
3. What is needed to resist the devil?
4. What is each part of the Christian’s armor?

5. What does the devil do when resisted and how long does he stay away? See Matthew 4:1-11.
  6. What are at least two ways one can draw near to God?
  7. What is the difference between cleansing the hands and purifying the heart?
  8. What is meant by a double-minded man?
  9. What is the spiritual benefit in feeling wretched over one's sins?
  10. What is the requisite to exultation from God?
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## WHAT DID YOU SAY? JAMES 4:11-12

*Keith A. Mosher, Sr.*

### EXPOSITION

One of the most prominent violations of God's law of love is in the way some talk about others, and how they also listen when others talk about others. And, some seem to revel in hearing juicy tidbits about anyone. James wrote: "Speak not evil one of another. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another" (James 4:11-12)?

In the first place, Christian speech must be "always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Colossians 4:6). Woods remonstrated concerning the disposition of man to engage in "slander, calumny, and detraction. . . We are all especially prone to make excuses for those whom we appreciate and love; to excuse, justify, and forgive them for their weaknesses; and to criticize, condemn, and flay those whom we dislike" (237). It is necessary to note here that the first phrase in James 4:11 is "stop speaking against each other" in the original! The imperative means that not only is the act condemned, but also the will to talk in such a way.

The partner of "evil speaking" is "evil hearing!" When another backbites, or slanders, what is the one doing who is listening to such? No one can change another's character, but it is certainly the case that speaker and hearer can play havoc with his character. David asked: "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who

shall dwell in thy holy hill” (Psalm 15:1)? The answer was: “He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbor, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor” (Psalm 15:2-3).

James equated evil speaking against another as judging the other. That is, one formed unfavorable opinions of one’s brother without being able to read his heart; for only God can do such. The only judgment one can make against another has to do with what he does: “for ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:20). Evil speakers presume that the other has surely operated from some ulterior or improper motive and the evil speaker has no temerity in saying so.

How does one “judge the law” when speaking evil of another? When one knows the law of God and its precepts, and then violates such, he is said to have set himself against God’s commands and has ignored the very precepts of the law. Is God’s law of loving one’s neighbor not good enough to be obeyed? Evidently, many must think so, for they disobey it often! It is the case that many do not realize that in disobedience to God, God hears that His law must be defective in some way and thus can be disregarded.

James capped his admonition with the ironic note that if one violates God’s law of loving one’s neighbor, one must think that he is the lawgiver (James 4:12)! No one is allowed to change God’s law, nor add to it. Nor is one allowed to make a law where He did not (Proverbs 30:5-6). Notice also that destroying is God’s business, and evil speakers walk there also. Woods suggested: There is, in the effort (of evil

speaking, K.M.), an allegation of superiority, the implication that the one doing it is better, more intelligent, possessed of greater wisdom than the others” (239).

The one who speaks evil of his brother has, ironically, condemned himself when he thinks he is condemning another. John wrote: “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen” (1 John 4:20)? Any effort on man’s part to take the judgment seat from God is blasphemy, rebellion, and hatred of the law of the Almighty. All judgment of motives and hearts belongs to the Christ, not to man (John 5:22). Note here John 19:11. Pilate thought he could judge God!

### **CONCLUSION**

How dare any, feeble, human think himself so superior to another that he can judge his heart? Note here Romans 14:4, 10-13. God wants His children to edify, not tear down. It is the case that marking known false teachers, or withdrawing from those known to be living in sin is not under consideration by James (Romans 16:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:6). The judging forbidden is the running down of another. Christians are to exhort (Hebrews 3:12); admonish (1 Thessalonians 5:14); and counsel (1 Timothy 6:3,17) one another out of love.

### **STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. What are some different ways to evil speak?
2. Discuss how the church is affected by gossip.
3. How does Matthew 18:15-20 apply to James 4:11-12?
4. What is the difference between censorious judgment and fruit inspecting?
5. See John 7:24 and apply it to James 4:11-12.
6. Who is the judge at the second coming?

## GOD MUST BE IN THE CHRISTIAN'S PLANNING: JAMES 4:13-17

*Keith A. Mosher, Sr.*

### EXPOSITION

It is most interesting to note that the Christians to whom James wrote, who were persecuted and scattered, still had some among them who thought that their lives would continue uninterrupted and that all of their plans would come to fruition. "Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain" (James 4:13). Woods wrote: ". . .the whole of chapter 4 is a penetrating analysis of the sins which were common to those whom James wrote, the basic character of which was a presumptuous disregard for God and his way" (*Commentary* 241). It is the case that James 4:1-11 dealt with their preferring the world to God; James 4:11-12 dealt with their contempt for God's law of love; and this last section of the chapter is about their presumptuous confidence in their futures. Note the following: Proverbs 27:1 and Luke 12:16-21.

The idea that material wealth will always be available was also presumptuous, for they thought that their sales efforts would result in "gain" (James 4:13b)! The latter term is from *kerdesomen* and the concept is that their efforts would always make a profit. Note that James knew that they were saying these things, and in reality the phrase "ye that say" is from *legontes*, meaning they were giving thought and reason to such plans (James 4:13a)!

Their planning was premature: "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow" (James 4:14a). The phrase "ye know not" is from *epistamai* and means "to

be certain;” and they could not be so about the future. Their sin was not in the planning, but doing so without regard for God.

“For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14b). One could translate *aphanidzomene* as *disappears* instead of vanishes. The meaning, however, is the same. Life is short, so do not live it without God! One should stop and consider his existence and its character, for until one comes to grips with his mortality, he will not be able to live his life for the Lord. See Job 7:6-10. [The American Standard Version reads: “For ye are a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then disappears.”] See 1 Peter 1:24.

“For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that” (James 4:15). All of our plans should be made with the provision that ***if God wills***, we will carry them out. The phrase “this or that” [*touto ‘e ekeino*] includes every act of life that we propose to do; for only God can dispose. I do not believe that James gave us some magical formula to say so that we are successful, but rather he enjoined a disposition of heart that includes God in all of life. God’s will must always take precedence over mine (Acts 18:11; 1 Corinthians 4:19; 16:7). This attitude of bending to God’s will is most Christ-like (Luke 22:42). If James meant that the words said would be sufficient as a mere addition to some statement about one’s plans, the phrase would soon become meaningless and glib.

“But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil” (James 4:16). The word *rejoice* is from *kauchasthe* and this form emphasized that they were glorying in their own efforts, and their *boastings* [ASV *vauntings*] is translated from *alazoneiais* (root is *aladzon*) and means something like *wanderings*. Eventually, the

term came to mean an *imposter, that is one who was wandering in a country not his own!* The one who leaves God out of his planning is travelling in a place where he ought not to be. Woods commented that such an arrogant disposition led one to “ignore God in life’s affairs, and to live with the assumption that man alone is the architect of his fortunes” (*Commentary* 251). Those who believe that *humans* are the highest form of life (humanists) hold the views being condemned by James. [The etymology of the word translated *boastings* suggests that James’ readers were making the claim of sufficiency without God, and the word appears only one other time in the New Testament and is translated *the vain glory of life* (1 John 2:16).]

“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (James 4:17). Knowing to keep God in one’s plans, but not doing so, “aggravates the sin and enhances the guilt” (Woods 253). It is difficult to know whether James 4:17 is a universal maxim or is to be a principle limited to the context of leaving God out of one’s planning. Note John 9:41; Luke 12:47-48; John 15:22; 13:17. The principle of omitting God from human plans, here stated by James, was applied by Paul to matters of eating meats offered to idols and observing days (Romans 14:23). It is the case that many hear, but do not heed God’s message.

### **CONCLUSION**

Every parable in the New Testament reveals that the punishment meted out was not for something bad the individual did, but was something good he did not do. James insisted that man’s plans, without God, are arrogant efforts and enhance the guilt of the sin being committed. Perhaps the sin of omission is worse than that of commission?

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Were the people, to whom James wrote, suffering? If so, why was it the case that leaving God out of their plans was such an unusual sin?
  2. What was the presumption of those planning to go to some city, and was it a calculated plan?
  3. What does anyone know about tomorrow? What time does anyone really have?
  4. What is your life?
  5. What evil was committed by rejoicing and boasting over one's plans?
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## A WARNING TO THE RICH: JAMES 5:1-6

*Keith A. Mosher, Sr.*

### EXPOSITION

The text of James 5:1-6 contains a condemnation of those who have become rich through fraud, and sets forth the proposition that a money lover will go to great lengths for financial gain. "Go to now ye rich men" is a warning that what they thought [and these were Christians to whom James wrote] was that they "had it made!" But, the real end of their efforts would be "weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you" (James 5:1). It is worth noting that there is no call for repentance here, but that only ruin awaits those who were totally worldly. Perhaps James was trying to build up the persecuted and homeless saints [James 1:1] by illustrating the ruinous end of such money lovers. Note here Matthew 6:19-21; 10:23-24; Luke 8:14 and Luke 12:15-20. It is obvious that the love of riches keeps one from truly loving God (Matthew 7:12; Luke 16:24-25). Note also that James does not address the rich as brethren as he did for his readers in so many other places. [The Greek text contains a participle, which means that the *miserias* were already coming to the rich.] To enjoy ease of life in the here and now does not necessarily spell hope for the future (Luke 19:44; Matthew 19:23). Someone once asked, "Can you tell me where hell is?" The answer that came was, "Yes!" "It is at the end of a Christ-less life!" Wealth should have instrumental rather than intrinsic value.

The Holy Spirit had James add: "Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten" (5:2). Perhaps the "garments" had been purchased to show off to others (Luke 16:19). But riches can and do corrupt, for money says,

“Hold me; spend me for self-indulgence; or: give me away for the benefit of others.”

What is your money saying to you?”

Riches can be “cankered” (James 5:3a). The term, *cankered*, is from *katiotai* indicating rusting through all the way to the bottom. All know that in the physical world gold and silver do not rust, so James was illustrating how God can put an end to the misuser of one’s wealth all the way to nothing. The rust will be “a witness against you” James added (James 5:3b), so that the misuse of riches and their destruction is testimony to the rich ones, who hoarded the wealth they accumulated by fraud, of their eventual end. They would experience God’s fiery judgment, just as their riches decayed. The next to the last phrase in James 5:3 is “shall eat your flesh as it were fire.” Miserliness and greed will suffer punishment at judgment day (Matthew 6:19-21; cf. Isaiah 10:16 and Ezekiel 15:17). Woods noted that: “It should not be overlooked that the word ‘flesh,’ in our text, is plural, literally, ‘your flesh,’ (*tassarkas*), and the reference is to every part of them” (*Commentary* 262).

Finally, James penned: “Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days” (James 5:3b). Note here Romans 2:4-5. Many in the world actually believe that their hoard of money will protect them, but in reality they are storing up God’s wrath against themselves.

The sins of the rich are then enumerated by James: “Behold, the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered in the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the

just; and he doth not resist you” (5:4-6). Note Deuteronomy 24:14-15 and Leviticus 19:13. The employees working for the rich were defrauded by them, for they did not pay those hired hands the amount required by their labors. God will hear the cries of His children who are so badly treated and God had James call such withholding of funds as being **fraud** (*aphustereo*, meaning to deprive or keep back). Such fraud is a vicious practice (Jeremiah 22:13).

Note how the word, *aphustereo*, is translated in 1 Corinthians 7:5 and 6:3. To pay a workmen according to his worth is listed as a commandment in Mark 10:19. Such employers, as mentioned by James, were bilking, cheating, deluding, and victimizing their employees. See Colossians 3:22-25 and 4:1. It is interesting to note that this kind of fraud is listed as one that cries out to heaven; there are three such “crying” sins mentioned in the Bible (Hebrews 12:18-29; Job 16:18 31:38; Revelation 6:6-9). The crieth (*krazei*) is a yell to heaven for vengeance; the cries (*boai*) is a strong appeal for help (James 5:4).

The rich had fattened their hearts for a day of slaughter (judgment) and as Adam who fell from eating, and Noah who fell from drinking, the fraudulent, “fat” rich were on their way to destruction. It also the case that because the rich could control the courts, they were getting away with murder in a legal way (James 5:6). Many commentators believe that James used the very murder of Jesus as the illustration as to how terrible the sins of the rich were (*Woods* 270). The rich Jews, of course, had a history of “legal murder” (Matthew 23:29-35).

## CONCLUSION

The fraudulent rich had judgment coming. They hoarded their money, cheated their workers, and murdered the just, in a legal way, of course [I said sarcastically]. If the term *just* (James 5:6) is a reference to the Christ, then the horrendous nature of their sins is compounded. The rich had benefitted no one but themselves (cf. Matthew 5:38-45).

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### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the wrong way to consider money?
2. What is the right way to use money?
3. What is the end of the rich who commit fraud and why?
4. What is the meaning of gold and silver rusting?
5. What are the two cries of those defrauded?
6. Is America a rich country? How are folks doing here in pleasing God?

## WAITING WITH PATIENCE: JAMES 5:7-11

*Keith A. Mosher, Sr.*

### EXPOSITION

James had tried to comfort his readers with the thoughts of what awaits those who were oppressing them, even some of their own, (James 5:1-6), but then wrote that those being persecuted should: “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord” (James 5:7a). The term, translated *patient*, is from *makrothumersate* and literally means “long of temper” or “longsuffering.” James meant that the Lord would *come* with justice for those persecutors who troubled the faithful, but the faithful must endure the time of affliction. The term translated *patience* (James 1:3-4) is from *hupomone* and means “to stand under” when *things* are troubling, but *makrothumersate*, here, means to bear up under the trouble that comes from *persons*. It seems to me that James implied that the wicked would be punished at the same time that the faithful found victory.

James illustrated his thoughts about patience first with the farmer. “Behold, the husbandman waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, while he waits for the early and latter rain” (James 5:7b). Since the seasons in the Near East are reversed from those in the west, the farmer planted in the time of our fall, the early rain, and reaped in the time of our spring, the latter rain (cf. Genesis 8:22). But, the farmer had no way to hasten the growth process, but must wait for his crops to mature.

As is the farmer, so should be the faithful Christian in his longsuffering (James 5:8). Anxiety is a useless activity for God’s children (cf. Philippians 4:5-7). A

farmer knows that he cannot speed up the process, and Christians must cultivate the grace of patience, for the *coming* justice of the Lord is always on its way (cf. Isaiah 13:6).

While waiting patiently for God's justice, the Christian should: "Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth at the door" (James 5:9). At first glance the foregoing verse may seem out of place in James' imperatives about longsuffering, but a further look will take in the fact that if, while waiting for justice on those who are practicing evil against them, the Christian starts to practice a very wrong thing himself, he will face punishment too; for the judge is always ready to act. It is imperative that God's children do not have the same disposition toward others that *evildoers* have toward the faithful.

James second illustration concerning patience is an observation about the Old Testament prophets of God (James 5:10). The term translated *suffering* is from *kakopathias* and denotes outward trials, and the Christian is admonished by James to copy the examples of those men of God who were often killed by those who hated their messages (cf. Hebrews 11:32-40). Since James noted that those prophets had "spoken in the name of the Lord," the imperative to have patience is made stronger. Who would have thought that men on a divine mission under God's authority would still be persecuted? See Matthew 5:3-11 and note the fact that Jesus' disciples face a similar fate as did the prophets of old.

What is it that makes a hero? "Behold, we count them happy (*blessed*, K.M.) which endure" (James 5:11a). The term, *endure* is from *hupomone*, and is the same word translated patience in James 1:3-4. To bear up, without complaint, is not the

complete idea here, for the prophets often cried out to God (cf. Jeremiah 15:8). But when one's murmuring leads to apostasy, then that one has given in to the suffering and trial. It is hard to understand how the wicked can prosper and the saints can suffer, and even king David had a great difficulty with the foregoing thought (Psalm 73:1-15). Woods noted: "An infidel once addressed the following note to the editor of a country paper. 'Sir: I have a religious neighbor who, when he prays, I curse; when he goes to church, I go fishing; yet, in October my harvest is as bountiful as his. How do you explain it?' The editor answered: 'Sir, you err in assuming God settles all of his accounts in October'" (*Commentary* 285).

James' final illustration of the kind of patience required in order to stay faithful to God is the example of Job: "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy" (James 5:11b). The "end of the Lord" is a way of saying that God's purpose in Job had a good outcome or goal (cf. Job 1:21; 42:10). Job learned, through all of his terrible agony, that God had not caused his suffering, and that God was Job's friend. Note here some promises to Christians (Romans 8:28, 31-32, 37-38; 2 Peter 1:4). [The word, *pitiful*, means full of pity and is so translated in the American Standard Version.]

### **CONCLUSION**

Lessons abound in the Old Testament about longsuffering (cf. Romans 15:4). The Christian should remember the Old Testament farmers, prophets, and Job and prayerfully draw strength from their examples of endurance. The disposition to be overly anxious about the trials of life is a common one, and so patience needs much emphasis for God's children. There is no real happiness or blessedness to be found

in this world, and so Christians must learn to endure until the end (cf. Revelation 2:10).

### **STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. What is the difference between the terms patience, James 1:3-4, and patient found at James 5:7?
2. What is meant by the terms, "early and latter rains" (James 5:7)?
3. What "coming of the Lord" is meant at James 5:8?
4. What might happen to the persecuted who practice evil?
5. Can you think of all the prophets who suffered and discuss them?
6. What should we, as Job, learn from affliction?

## IS IT PERMISSIBLE TO TAKE A LEGAL OATH? JAMES 5:12

*Keith A. Mosher, Sr.*

### EXPOSITION

The last few verses of the book of James contain a variety of injunctions to confirm the faith of the disciples, the first of which flats concerns the taking of oaths.

There are two relevant passages of the Bible about oath-taking, one from James 5:2 and this present study, and one from the very lips of Jesus recorded at Matthew 5:33-37. The two read as follows: "But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation" and "Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths. But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne; Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh from evil."

The words, *swear not*, (in both passages above) are from *mee omnuete*, a present active imperative (continuous command) with the negative and literally means: "do not keep on swearing." The term is used of affirming or denying by an oath (Matthew 26:74; Luke 1:73; Mark 6:23; Hebrews 3:11, 18; 4:3; 7:21). To swear in the biblical sense, then, means to utter an oath while invoking the witness of God. From what Matthew recorded from the Lord, and what can be learned from history, oath taking was a very common practice in the first century. The oath was either a

promise to do or not do something accompanied by an appeal to God to witness the words.

Old Testament oaths were quite common. There were agreements made to do certain things (Genesis 14:22; 24:2, 8-9). Oaths were made in pledging allegiance to a superior (Ecclesiastes 8:2; 1 Kings 18:10) and in promises to a ruler (1 Samuel 14:24). Vows were often oaths, either public or legal (Deuteronomy 19:6-9; 23:21-22; Leviticus 6:3). The wording of the oaths took various forms (Genesis 31:53; 1 Samuel 14:39, 44; 20:23). The oaths were highly respected, and God's law governed them (Leviticus 19:12, 16-19; Zechariah 8:17). It is the case, then, that Old Testament oaths must be viewed in light of the third commandment against taking God's name *in vain*; that is, frivolous oaths were forbidden.

It is not wrong to use the name, God, in our conversations, if we are speaking reverently and respectfully and/or teaching about Him. There are a number of recorded examples in the New Testament regarding the latter practices (cf. Acts 18:21; Romans 6:2; 2 Timothy 2:18; etcetera).

The question remains, then, about the taking of judicial oaths. The third commandment implies that all oaths are to be taken reverently (Deuteronomy 6:13; 10:20). Using God's name in a frivolous, trifling manner is forbidden. Yet, there are circumstances where a direct, solemn appeal to God in support of truth is scriptural (Romans 1:9; 9:1; 2 Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 1:20; Philippians 1:8).

Christ, on trial before Caiaphas, testified under oath (Matthew 26:63-64). And God, Himself, swore by Himself, for there was no one greater (Hebrews 6:13). And, the Old Testament prophets often swore to God for affirmation (cf. Isaiah

65:16). Take a look at the foregoing passages and note the multitude of oaths such as: "God is my witness." "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not." "I call God for a witness upon my soul." Caiaphas to Christ: "I adjure thee by the living God" and Jesus' answer. "Before God." All oaths, it seems to me, whether in life or the courtroom, must be reverent and truthful to God. One who "swears" to tell the truth is holding up God as the epitome of truth and not in anyway desecrating His name, unless, of course, the oath-taker is lying!

### **CONCLUSION**

Swearing on a stack of Bibles, or heaven, or earth, or any other such vows, without real adherence to truth is condemned. The Christian has to mean yes when he says yes, and no when he says no. His word must be his bond. The taking of an oath, that is "in the name of God," is not mentioned by Jesus or James, so that the emphasis in their teachings is about swearing just to cover up an untruth. Such oaths are tantamount to taking the name of God in vain.

### **STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. What words in James 5:12 emphasize the importance of proper oath-taking?
2. What does it mean that a Christian should say yes and be nothing other than truthful?
3. What are some examples, biblical or from your life, of frivolous swearing?
4. What are some passages on vows and oaths from the Old Testament?
5. What are some passages on vows and oaths from the New Testament?
6. What phrase is not mentioned in the Bible in connection with improper oath-taking?

## PRAYER, PRAISE, AND SUFFERING: JAMES 5:13-18

*Keith A. Mosher, Sr.*

### EXPOSITION

Because of the lack of punctuation in the Greek manuscripts, there is a question as to whether or not verse thirteen is a question, but the meaning is not changed in either way. “Is any among you afflicted (*kakopathei*, suffering, K.M.), let him pray. Is any merry, let him sing psalms” (James 5:13). Certainly James’ first readers were suffering (James 1:1-4) and disciples, today, go through mental anguish, sickness, grief, pain, and all the other burdens of life. Such rough times call for *proseuchestho* (*to pray; always used in reference to petitioning God*). Note 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18; Philippians 1:9; 1 Timothy 2:8; and Jude 20, among other verses.

However, afflicted Christians can, at times, be merry (*euthumei*, cheerful, K.M.; cf. Acts 27:22, 25). Those in good spirits can keep on singing praises to God by making melody in their hearts (cf. Ephesians 5:19). In singing praise to God one is acknowledging that God is his refuge in sorrow and in joy.

James then asked: “Is any sick among you” (James 5:14a)? The word for *sick* means to be weak or feeble and comes from *asthenos*, literally meaning “without strength” (cf. Matthew 10:8; Mark 6:56; John 5:7; Acts 9:37; Philippians 2:27; et al). The “sick” are admonished to “call for the elders of the church” (James 5:14b). The elders, [*presbuteroi* here, but not meaning just the older men, for James added “of the church” (James 5:14c)] are to “pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” (James 5:14d).

There are several views among brethren as to the reference to anointing with oil. A large number of commentators opt for the idea that the elders are to pray and anoint with oil for medicinal purposes, as did the good Samaritan (Luke 10:34). Also, many of the ancients such as Philo, Pliny, and Galen are known to have extolled the virtues of oil for medicinal purposes. [The Greek scholar, A. T. Robertson thought that what was meant was "God and doctor."] It is the case, though, that nothing in the text references the purpose of the anointing other than that it is, in some way, connected to the healing of the sick. Second, verses such as Ruth 3:3; 1 Samuel 12:20; 14:2; Daniel 10:2-3; Micah 6:15 and Matthew 6:16-7 have caused some to think that James' concept of the anointing was simply a way of indicating a return to normal activities for the sick, but this view would not explain why the elders were called.

A third view is that the act of anointing was done out of friendship and encouragement as when Mary anointed the feet of Jesus (John 12:3; Luke 7:46). The foregoing idea is confirmed, it is said, by the Greek term, *aleipo* [anoint] which is connected to the trials of life rather than to a religious ceremony. Yet, in Mark 6:13 the anointing is said to be connected to the miraculous.

It is the concept of this writer that the anointing with oil, mentioned by James, was a symbolic act representing God's approval of the **supernatural** healing of the sick person. Note James 5:15a. "And the prayer of faith shall save the sick; and the Lord shall raise him up." [The third person with shall is imperative and implies that the saving of the sick must happen; therefore this is a reference to a miracle of healing.] Such an anointing of approval of God's working is recorded at 1 Samuel

10:1 and Psalm 89:20. The contextual evidence at Mark 6:13 also records such as use of oil and, certainly, not all of the elders in the first century would have possessed the miraculous gift of healing (1 Corinthians 12:28-30). Some elders were given miraculous gifts (Ephesians 4:8-11), but probably not all. Since miraculous gifts are not available today, there can be no need to symbolize a supernatural healing with such an anointing. If James meant all disciples would always be healed, then no disciple would have ever died. God's will was in this matter also.

Connected with the physical healing is James' admonition that: "if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him" (James 5:15b). Connected to such forgiveness is also: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). The numerous references in the Bible for Christians to pray for each other and for seeking forgiveness need constant attention and such faults must be forgiven in the proper ways (cf. Matthew 18:15-20).

James concluded this section with the providential connection of a righteous man's prayer to God's will. Elijah, a man just like us, prayed for no rain and then for rain, and both occurred. Rain withheld or falling is not a miracle, but is in the providence of God. Woods wrote: "If we are supposed to wonder if a similar prayer prayed today—that is for rain or for its cessation—would be answered, we may be sure that if the same circumstances existed and the will of the Lord was the same, the result would likewise be the same. However, where the circumstances differ so greatly, and we are not sure what the will of the Lord is in such matters, our prayers

should always be conditioned by the desire that the will of the Lord be done”

(*Commentary* 309-310).

### **CONCLUSION**

When the Christian is sick he should be able to call on his brethren for help, and when he is in sin, he should be able to call on his brethren for help then, too.

Sick or cheerful, without strength or feeling well, the Christian has a Friend in God.

And God's child can count on Him to answer prayer.

### **STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. What do you do when sick?
2. What do you do when cheerful? (Is God on your mind then also?)
3. What are some of the views about anointing with oil for he sick?
4. What kind of prayer can one make for a brother or sister in sin f. 1 John 16-17)?

## THE "DELINQUENT" BROTHER (OR SISTER): JAMES 5:19-20

*Keith A. Mosher, Sr.*

### EXPOSITION

In case a brother or sister is led away from the truth, James' inspired advice is to "convert him" (James 5:19b). Such an admonition implies that a Christian can err to the point of no longer being God's child (cf. Galatians 5:4)! Whether a Christian strays from truth, teaches error, or reenters a worldly lifestyle, he has need of returning to his first love [cf. Revelation 2:1-5]; the latter effort requires his being **converted**, for he has become a sinner again: "Brethren, if any of you (i.e. Christians, K.M.) do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know (the one doing the converting, K.M.), 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" (James 5:19-20; all emphasis is added, K.M.).

Paul made a similar request, as James had, of the saved who knew how to handle such matters: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). The latter command from the apostle, written during the age of the miraculous gift of discernment of spirits (1 Corinthians 12:10), implied that not everyone is able to convert a lost brother, but only those who have the spiritual know-how. Reinstating a brother, then, is not accomplished by a friendly visit. There would be nothing wrong with such a trip to someone's home, but conversion requires a Bible study.

While doing "local work," I often came into contact with unfaithful members, and I soon realized that just calling on them was not very effective. When they would be willing to study the Bible with me, I would start with the same subjects used for the alien sinner: Bible authority; the difference between the testaments; what must I do to be saved [yes, this too, in order to return them to their first love, by reminding them of their baptisms]; what is the church of Christ? etcetera. Such studies would average about one hour each, and occur on a weekly basis. If the delinquent would only give me a few minutes of his time, I would use a series of questions [in booklet form] designed to find out what "excuse" the delinquent was using to stay away from the church. [Unless one really loves the souls of the lost, one should probably think twice about using such material, for it is rather critical and to the point. The unconverted should be encouraged to read each statement aloud.] Start on the first page with: "I confessed my faith in Christ and was baptized by \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ on (date)\_\_\_\_\_. At that time I loved the Lord, wanted to live for him, and I wanted to go to heaven. I began serving him as a member of the church at \_\_\_\_\_, but for the following reasons I am no longer faithful to the Lord. [A blank is provided before each "excuse" **on each proceeding page** [except for the next to last page] for the unconverted to check as the "reason." ] \_\_\_\_\_I realize the church is not a hospitable for sinners and not a club for the perfect. But, I am too proud to confess wrong or to be my brother's keeper. I prefer to do things my own way and hereby reject James 5:19-20. \_\_\_\_\_Some of the members do not live right, and after following Galatians 6:1-2 and failing to restore or correct them, I believe I am right

in not attending services any longer and in not serving the living God anymore.

\_\_\_\_\_ I did not have my say, because the elders failed to consult me and made decisions I did not like. I reject their leading and their shepherding care. I do so, fully understanding Hebrews 13:17. \_\_\_\_\_ I was offended by another member, and after following the Lord's instructions (Matthew 18:15-20), and failing to correct the matter, I believe I am justified in turning away from the Lord and his church. \_\_\_\_\_

I was involved, and in spite of the fact that I have done all the Lord would have me to do to be friendly and hospitable by visiting the sick, bereaved, and shut-ins; other members have not been hospitable and friendly to me when I was sick. I am justified, therefore, in turning away from Jesus who died for me and from the church he purchased with his blood (Acts 20:28). [The following statements are all on the next to last page of the booklet.] I fully realize I should be restored to Christ and His service, but \_\_\_\_\_ I now love the world more than my soul, sin more than my Savior, and intend to eat, drink, and be merry. \_\_\_\_\_ I am now more concerned with pleasure than I am with my Savior in spite of all He has done for me (Matthew 10:37-39). \_\_\_\_\_ I do not have the time to follow Christ, for I am fully devoted to my career and my possessions. \_\_\_\_\_ I now love my rest and recreation more than I love my Lord or His church. I reject Colossians 3:1-3 and Matthew 6:33. \_\_\_\_\_ I love the temporary more than the eternal, and I do not want to be hindered by the Bible, Christ, or His disciples. I prefer to let my wants be my god, and to become an enemy of the cross (Philippians 3:18-19). \_\_\_\_\_ I do not care that Jesus died for me. I do not desire or need a Savior. The last page follows: Inasmuch as not one of the foregoing reasons is valid, and I have no real excuse for forsaking Jesus; and knowing that God

loves me, I hereby follow the teaching of Acts 8:22-24. I will return to Jesus and receive forgiveness from Him and my brethren. I am truly sorry I left his fellowship and will make sincere efforts faithfully to serve Him again. Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

It is the case that of twenty-seven "hard-core" delinquents at one congregation where I preached, nine were restored using the above material in a prayerful, sometimes tearful, way. James offered a promise to those who give effort to restore a lost brother in that the teacher will "hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:20b). By helping a brother achieve repentance and forgiveness, the teacher is enabling the unconverted to avoid an eternal separation from God (cf. Psalm 32:1-2).

### **CONCLUSION**

There is no formal conclusion to the book of James, but the half-brother of the Lord ends his writings on a good note of restoring the fallen, and of encouraging all the persecuted Christians to live in faith.

## ADDENDUM:

### GOD'S WISDOM OR MAN'S: DO YOU KNOW THE DIFFERENCE?

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The biblical evidence is that man, left to his own devices, has never been satisfied with God's way (cf. Rom. 3:23; KJV). In a message to the church at Philippi, Paul instructed those first-century Christians to "approve the things that are excellent" (Phi. 1:10). That is, those disciples were to know the difference between when a thing really was biblical and when it was not. And, they were to **approve** of only the best things. Intellectual attainment of knowledge is of little benefit, if one does not know what truth is and how to recognize it. [The scribes and Pharisees were trained in the schools of that day, but, for the most part, they failed to find the excellent way of the Lord.]

The word translated *excellent* in Philippians 1:10 is from the Greek term *diaphero* (Wigram 1314). At Matthew 6:26 *diaphero* is translated *better*; at Matthew 10:31 one finds *of more value* as the translator's preference; and at Galatians 2:6 the King James translators used the word *differeth* as the meaning (Ibid.). The deceased former head of the American Mission to the Greeks, Spiros Zodhiates gave the meanings of "*to carry different ways; separate; distinguishing things that are different; to make a difference*" (Word Study Dictionary 445). It is the case, given the latter meanings, that when one calls light darkness and darkness light, that one is hardly putting the best construction on the ideal of approving the best way.

For example, most people do not distinguish between biblical love and sentimentalism. Paul urged the Philippians to abound in love, but the apostle

separated (made a difference) between love and sentiment; for to abound in love would influence mental understanding or judgment: "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve the things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ" (Phi. 1:9-10). The mind that lacks true love for the Lord will understand truth, but sentiment can blind one to the truth (John 14:6, 15). How many have refused to obey the gospel because their sentiments for parents or friends stood in the way? Jesus said: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Mat. 10:37-39). Note also the following: "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 The. 2:10).

A second example of things that are different is that between *ugly legalism* and *soundness*. Paul wrote that Timothy should: "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:13). The Greek term translated *sound* in the foregoing verse is *hupotuposis* and the ancient Greeks used the term when referring to "a sketch that an artist might make when he began to paint a picture;" that is he would make a "concise representation or pattern" (Zodhiates 1430). To teach exactly what the Bible does say is healthy or sound and means that the student was following an exact duplication of the message. But, pleading for the truth does not allow for ugliness in doing so.

Peter insisted that his fellow Christians should be “of one mind” but the apostle followed that order with “having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful (full of pity, K.M.); be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing” (1 Pet. 3:8). The purpose of discussion of that which is causing a difference is the salvation of souls, not the winning of arguments.

In the third place, there has always been the matter of opinions of one versus the opinions of another. There have always been those with frail consciences who could not eat the meat offered to an idol (Rom. 14:1-6) and the ones who could digest such foods (Rom. 14:2). When one does not know the difference between a doctrine and an opinion based on a Bible concept, one has not approved that which is excellent and has not kept his opinions to himself (Rom. 14:22).

Men have not understood the excellent way, now, of the New Testament as opposed to the disenfranchised Old Testament law. And men still teach error about the excellent works of faith and think that such are works of merit. It takes a lot of effort and a great love for truth always to discover the excellent way. In fact, Paul said that such love was the “greatest” or the “more excellent way” (1 Cor. 13:13; 12:31).