

JAMES CHAPTER ONE

Believers should meet trials with patience, faith and wisdom and that faith automatically produces works. Do not confuse this with working for your salvation or working to keep it. James is one of the general epistles, or letters, to the churches. These include First and Second Peter, the three Johns and Jude. Consider these separately from the Pauline epistles. The book of James was written around 35 AD and so predates the Pauline epistles. Now, that said, most teachers and commentators, say that James was written to Jewish Christians. That may be true but do be aware that the Bible does not say that. It says the book of James was written to the twelve tribes scattered abroad. That could include unsaved Jews as well. Remember that last as it is important and comes up later. The author of James is either James Zebedee or James the half brother of Jesus with the nod going to James the half brother of Jesus who was the pastor of the Jerusalem church. This is the earliest of the New Testament epistles. Nothing in the Book of James goes beyond Acts chapter nine. Paul wrote to explain the gospel while James wrote to give us the practical side. Christians can receive spiritual guidance from this letter but Paul provides the doctrinal standards for the New Testament Christian. James did not believe Jesus was the Messiah until after His resurrection. See John chapter 7 verse 5 for this. He believed after Jesus appeared to him after His resurrection. See 1 Cor ch 15 vs seven for this. Finally, James is carrying forward the idea that works are important in the Christian life. There was an element of works in the Old Testament but the works always came after the person believed God for salvation. Think of it this way; Noah believed God and was justified but if he had not built that boat he would have drowned with the rest of humanity. Abraham believed God but if he had not left Ur and gone into a new land that God showed him he would have died in Ur and probably gone to hell. So, works were important in Old Testament times and they are still important today. Not for salvation but to please God and to present a good witness to the lost.

1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

The book is addressed to Jewish believers scattered by persecution. The epistle was probably written before the Gentile congregations became

common.

2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

Trials test our faith and this produces patience. We know that testing is a path to development of Christian character.

3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

The natural response to adversity is to escape it. But God uses trouble to mature His people. The testing of faith drives believers to deeper communion and greater trust in Christ. These things in turn produce a stable, godly and righteous Christian

4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

We know that he is writing to believers because he addresses them as brethren and beloved brethren. The Jews are scattered by persecution, much of it, ironically, at the hands of Paul. Though James is writing to the twelve tribes which are now scattered throughout the middle east, nothing else happened. The leading Christian Jews simply stayed at Jerusalem and did not take up the “great commission”. As a general rule, the Jews would not associate with Gentiles. This is a good place to take a look at Luke ch 14 vs 21 and following to see the reason for the calling out of both the church and, indirectly, the apostle Paul. **So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. 22 And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. 23 And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.** That's us Gentiles. The halt, the lame, the blind, the maimed and the poor. We are the scrapings from the bottom of the barrel but we are the Church, the very Body of Christ on earth. We are special only in that we are covered by the blood of Jesus.

5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

God gives understanding if we ask. This verse has at least two applications. God gives us understanding of the scriptures as we have need and he also gives us understanding of why we are being tested. I say “at least two” because God often reveals more.

6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

Praying, and doubting at the same time, is useless. It is useless to pray and ask for something, if you do not believe you will get an answer to that prayer. Faith is what causes the prayer to be answered. In most cases, when Jesus healed the sick, He said, your faith has made you whole.

7 For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

The man that wavers faith is not constant. He says he believes, but he does not believe in his heart. The correct thing to do, if we see that our faith is wavering is to call out in prayer. You may remember, from Mark 9:24, the man who came to Jesus to have his son healed. His prayer was; **And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."**

8 A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

Ask and do not have second thoughts. If you lack faith expect nothing. A waverer is not wholly committed to God. God wants you to be 100% committed. To ask, and not believe the prayer will be answered, is an insult to God.

9 Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:

The brother "of low degree" may have a lowly task to do here on the earth, but that has nothing to do with his position with Christ. Brothers in Christ are all the same in the sight of God. There are no class distinctions in Christ.

10 But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.

This is the flip side of verse nine. Everyone, with the exception of Enoch, dies. No matter how much money, and stuff, you have, it will not keep you out of the grave.

11 For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

Rejoice in humility. That is a hard task for most of us. James is showing here an advantage that the poor have in that it is easier for the poor to be humble than for the rich. Riches fade quickly as does this life. The accumulation of riches is not wrong as long as it is done honestly but we are cautioned to "lay up treasures in Heaven". God gives grace to the humble.

12 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he

shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

Temptation is used in two ways in the Bible. We can be tempted to do evil and this comes from Satan or from our own sinful nature. We can also be tempted as a trial we must endure in order to be tested. This trial comes from God.

13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

God does not tempt us to sin, that is Satan's job.

14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

James is referring to that type of faith which produces nothing and so is a "dead faith".

15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

You can think of lust as the grandfather of death. Lust leads to sin and sin leads to death. In our society today we think of lust as having to do with sexual sin. It does, but it can also apply to most other things in life. You can lust after money, hobbies, tv, sports etc. If you are obsessed with something you lust after it.

16 Do not err, my beloved brethren.

17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

These verses go back to verse thirteen. We are cautioned not to be hearers only. This produces nothing. You only gain spiritually when you begin to do something with what you hear.

18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Works are the visible evidence of faith. This says; "He begat us" so we are now His children. Ephesians 1:13-14 **"In whom ye also [trusted], after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise," "Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."** Do not miss that word sealed. That word, along with the word begat, and the fact that we are a

purchased possession is unmistakable proof that we have eternal security.

19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

Verse nineteen is loaded. These three things are how we are to meet the trials discussed in the previous verses. Swift to hear, slow to speak and slow to wrath. We are cautioned in Proverbs to listen and not talk so much. Have you ever noticed how, when you are having a conversation, that some people are not listening while you are speaking but are spending that time framing their answer in their mind.

20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

Jesus was slow to anger and, in fact, He was a very patient person. The Bible calls it longsuffering. We call it patience.

21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

Laid out in verses nineteen through twenty one are the steps to a life of faith. Commit these things to memory. This is speaking of being so full of Jesus and His Word, that we will have His Word implanted in our inner-most being. Our focus will be on God and His Word, and that will cause us to live the way we should.

22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

Professing Christians who are content with only hearing the Word, have made a serious spiritual miscalculation. Even the scribes and Pharisees were hearers of the Word of God. We may say we are Christians, but the real test is, do we live what we profess? Are we just saying and not doing?

23 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:

If you are a hearer only you are deceiving yourself. Real hearing involves doing something. The Holy Spirit is saying here “get moving for God”

24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

25 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 shall be blessed in his deed.

The “perfect law of liberty is not speaking of the Mosaic Law but of the New Covenant. These two verses contrast two opposites in the local church. Verse twenty four shows us the person who is never satisfied in any church. They move from church to church. There was an old term for these;”church hoppers”. There is no perfect church. The old joke is that if there were a perfect church as soon as you joined it wouldn't be perfect any more. True and true.

26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

Again we are warned about the power of the tongue and the damage it can do. This is also a warning against spiritual arrogance. If we “know it all” we will learn nothing. Final word about gossip. The men are as bad or worse than the women.

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

I love verse twenty seven. The instruction there is so simple and direct. This implies not only “going to” but also supplying their needs. Memorize this verse as it is a principle that applies all through scripture. There is a second part to this verse and that is that we are to stay away from the sins of the world. Those two things James calls “pure religion. There is only one we are not to help and that is the able bodied man who will not work. God makes the point that before he starves to death he will find work. Nuff said.

JAMES CHAPTER TWO

1 My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.

In His dealings with people Jesus showed only impartiality. For example, consider the humble people included in His genealogy, His choice of the humble village of Nazareth as His residence for 30 years, and His willingness to minister in Galilee and Samaria, both regions held in contempt by Israel’s leaders. Being a respecter of persons because of their station in life is not consistent with Christianity. Jesus taught that we are not to be a respecter of persons, if we are Christians.

2 For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;

This is judging people by their wealth, or lack of it. This goes on today in many churches.

3 And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:

Do notice here that neither the jewelry nor the fancy clothing are condemned but rather basing respect of the person on their material possessions.

4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?

God is not a respecter of persons. We are told elsewhere that Gentile and Jew, male and female, slave and free are all equal in the sight of God. In other words we are all no better than filthy rags in his sight UNLESS we are saved and under the blood of Jesus. In that case all He sees is the blood. James felt it necessary to stress this since he lived in an age when racial prejudice was rampant. The Jews would have nothing to do with the Gentiles even to the point of calling them dogs. A large part of the work of Jesus, and later Paul, was to break down these walls between Jew and Gentile. Ephesians ch 2 vs 14-15 says it best. **For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition [between us;] Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, [even] the law of commandments [contained] in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, [so] making peace;**

This did not come easily. Even the early church had problems with this bigotry until the apostle Paul came on the scene.

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?

Jesus ministered primarily to the poor. He said Himself that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to go to heaven. This is easy to understand. Many rich people feel they have no need of anything. All of their earthly needs are taken care of so there is no need to reach out to Jesus. That said, rich or poor, it is not how much you have but how you use that which you do have. I have heard the story many times that J.C. Penny tithed 90% of his income. If that is the case then that is one rich man doing what He should have been doing. Yet for all of Mr. Penny's riches, that widow who tossed in her last two mites gave more than Mr. Penny.

6 But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?

James is explaining that poor men seldom oppress anyone, but it is generally the rich who oppress the poor, not the other way around.

7 Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?

This is probably a reference to religious courts controlled by the Pharisees. Wealthy Jewish opponents of Christ were harassing these poor Christians. The name that we are called is Christian, which means we are followers of and believers in Christ.

8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:

Very few in the early church came from the rich or ruling classes. Most of the Christians were poor people. That is, the people in the world regard them as poor though they may be rich in faith. Jesus, with few exceptions, chose poor people to be his disciples.

9 But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

If you show any degree of partiality you are breaking God's law. Think about that. It is almost a part of our nature to treat people who are well off, better than some homeless person who wanders in off the street.

10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

The irony of these verses is that we are all sinners, but despite this God reaches out to us with the offer of salvation and eternal life. Not all sins are equally horrible to us but in God's sight sin is sin. This might be a good place to mention the difference between sin and sins. Sins are those things we do from day to day. These things need to be confessed and forgiven. Sin, any sin, is the thing that separates us from God. The theft of a penny will separate you from God as surely as a murder. That is a hard concept for us to grasp until we realize that a holy God does not accept sin in any form.

11 For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.

This is the Mosaic Law from the Old Testament but it is also reaffirmed, by

Jesus ,in the New Testament. In other words these things are moral law and apply to everyone under both covenants.

12 So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

Though we are still to operate under moral law we do have an out that the Old Testament people did not have. We can approach God directly,without offering any more sacrifice,and ask His forgiveness. We no longer have to drag a lamb down to the priest to be sacrificed and have that priest intercede for us. We have a permanent sacrifice and a priest,in Heaven,to speak for us.

13 For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

We can rejoice in the fact that we will not face judgment because of the law.

14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

God cares about the whole law and James is again warning us that we can not keep it. While we must occasionally judge the conduct of others we are warned that we will be judged with the same compassion we show to others. We are not to pick and choose which of God's commandments we will keep. Breaking one commandment is the same as breaking them all. This is why man could never be saved by the Law. We are to be judged by a different law,the law of liberty. 2 Corinthians ch 5 vs 10 has this to say. **For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things [done] in [his] body, according to that he hath done, whether [it be] good or bad**

So,we do not keep the ceremonial law and are not required to keep the dietary laws though it would be healthy to do so. The difference in keeping nine of those ten commandments is that now we can be forgiven when we break one of these commandments. THAT SAID”we do indeed keep nine of the the ten commandments as a part of living the Christian life. The one we no longer keep is the Sabbath. The moral law was in existence before the commandments were given and is still in effect today. It is a good thing for a Christian to remember that one day he will stand before God and be judged for his works .

15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

This is your brothers and sisters in Christ and not the whole world.

16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and

filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

The one that sickens me is the one who can help but will not. These are prone to say, "I will pray for you". I doubt that a person like that gets their prayers answered anyway.

17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

We can say we have faith, but we will not be believed, unless we have works to match up with our faith.

18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

One of the best 'works' to show your faith is in helping others.

How many times have you heard people say, when a street person asks for help; "They will just go and buy booze" or whatever.... That may be true but it is also an excuse not to give, so, buy them a Big Mac if you are really concerned about that. My take on the matter is, help them and let God take care of what they do with it. It is a good chance to witness and hand them a tract along with whatever else you care to give.

19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

You hear this one quoted and misused often to try and prove that belief is not enough. The devils do not have the opportunity to be saved as we do. Any chance they had is long gone in ages past. They are a prime example of God giving over to a reprobate mind. They have no more chance at salvation.

20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

Fear is the opposite of faith. We must act on our faith. Just to sit down and say you have faith, without doing something about it, actually shows lack of faith. Visible works help to prove our faith to the world.

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

This is one of the verses that the "salvation by works" people love to quote. The faith of Abraham was put into action when Abraham was about to offer his son, Isaac, as sacrifice to God. Faith brings results. This does not contradict Paul's clear teaching that Abraham was justified before God by grace alone through faith alone. For several reasons, James cannot mean that Abraham was constituted righteous before God because of his own good

works. James already stressed that salvation is a gracious gift in chapter one. In the middle of this passage in verse 23 James quoted Gen. 15:6, which claims that God credited righteousness to Abraham solely on the basis of his faith. Finally, the work that James said justified Abraham was his offering up of Isaac, an event that occurred many years after he first exercised faith and was declared righteous before God. Abraham's faith was tested to see if it was really faith, or just talk. He acted upon his faith, and God saved his son Isaac.

22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

This is an easy one to get wrong. The bottom line here is that works help to increase faith. The more you do for God, the stronger your faith becomes.

23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

"Imputed" means counted. Abraham's belief was counted unto him for righteousness. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. Without acting upon the faith that we have, it is not faith at all.

24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

Notice that this verse does not say a person is saved by works. They are justified by works and the references given are Abraham and Rahab both of whom are in the Old Testament. You could add many others to that list. Noah comes to mind. These people first believed God, then they did works because of that belief.

25 Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?

Rahab is an interesting lady. She is a prostitute but later turns up in the lineage of Jesus. These things do not occur by accident but by God's design in order to show us that anyone can be forgiven and used by God.

26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Now, here is where I get in trouble again. In THIS dispensation, The Church Age, we are saved, redeemed, justified and sealed by believing God. That is, by truly believing the core Christian belief. ***That belief is that

Jesus, the Christ, is the Messiah, the only begotten son of God, that he was born of a virgin, that he lived a sinless life, that he was tortured and died on Calvary's cross as a substitute for us and that he rose again and is now sitting at the right hand of God, and that he will return for us***. In THIS DISPENSATION once you get it you can not lose it. In other dispensations, that is, the tribulation, the millennium, the OT, this was not always exactly the case.

Now, for the village idiot in our midst be ready with at least ... John 10 vs 27-30. **My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: {10:28} And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any [man] pluck them out of my hand. {10:29} My Father, which gave [them] me, is greater than all; and no [man] is able to pluck [them] out of my Father's hand. {10:30} I and [my] Father are one.** In any case it will not matter. If God himself pointed to all the pertinent verses, and hit him over the head with a 2x4 he still would refuse to believe it. His response would be ... "well, I have always believed blah, blah blah". I suppose every church has at least one.

JAMES CHAPTER THREE

James begins this chapter with a warning to those who would be preachers, teachers, Sunday school leaders, deacons, etc. These are the ones James would classify as masters. Since the first part of this chapter is about the tongue, I believe this goes even further than that. I don't think we have to stretch the scripture too far to include those "masters" that waste the time of God's people while they spend time enjoying the sound of their own voice. All of us know some of those. James cautions those who would be leaders to examine their motives. Be sure you are leading from a position of submissiveness and not leading due to pride.

1 My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

Before we move on to the evils of the tongue consider that word "greater" "The adjective *greater* implies a harsher degree of treatment at the judgment seat."

2 For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

We all stumble and James includes himself here. This does not excuse his, or

our, stumbling. We know that we all stumble, but we should all strive for a better walk with the Lord. Now James seems to change gears and move back to the tongue. To not stumble in word shows true spiritual maturity. This is especially applies to teachers, who have more opportunity to sin with the tongue. James is speaking of teaching false, or incorrect doctrine here.

3 Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.

This shows that the tongue is part of a body that should be controlled by God. When the bit is in the horse's mouth, the rider can turn him with just a gentle pull on the reins. This is saying then, that a teacher whose tongue is controlled by God will help others to follow God. That is the point of teaching.

Now before I go on, permit me a rant. I challenge anyone here to show me, in scripture, where any of the Church leaders of the New Testament, preached like some of our modern preachers. Screaming, jumping around, running up and down, foaming at the mouth, throwing their bibles around and on and on. These things are putting on a show and that behavior has come to be accepted as normal preaching in some circles. If Jesus, the twelve, Paul, Timothy, Titus and others ever behaved like that I can't find it. Instead, they taught the people what they needed to know.

4 Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.

The horses bit and the ships rudder are tiny in comparison to the objects they control but both have tremendous power in control of the larger object. Something as small as the tongue can have tremendous power, for either good or evil.

5 Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

The tongue can be compared to a match in size but can be more destructive than a forest fire. The tongue resists control more than any other part of the body.

6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

Words we speak affect those around us. If we speak peaceful words, anger will be extinguished. Hell, as used here, conjures up not just the place but the Satanic forces that will someday inherit it. Remember that Hell was not set up for mankind but for the Devil and his angels. Its size has been increased to make room for lost humanity. That same Devil and his angels use the tongue as a tool for evil.

7 For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:

All of the things just named have been tamed by man but the human tongue has never been tamed nor will it ever be.

8 But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

No where else in scripture is the tongue described with the feeling that James uses here. Proverbs 6:24 *Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul and health to the bones.*

Proverbs 18:21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.

9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

The tongue can also wish evil on people made in God's image. This points out the hypocrisy of the tongue's activities. Let me say something about being made in God's image. We are made in God's image but, since the fall of Adam, that image is marred. For instance, we are created a trinity, (small t), as God is a Trinity. Since the fall, mankind's spirit is dead, making us incomplete. Salvation, through the blood of Jesus Christ, makes our spirit alive again, that is, born again.

10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

Nothing has ever been found in nature to compare to the human tongue as far as its ability to produce both good and evil from the same source.

11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?

This applies to an actual well of water but the spiritual application is the heart of man. A well does not produce both bitter and sweet water at the same time. Jesus had this to say in Matthew 12:34; **"O generation of vipers, how can**

ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."

12 Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

I like that expression "blessing and cursing" should not come from the same mouth. In spite of our fall and the resulting wickedness we are still made in the image of God and should be using our tongue for blessing, in other words use it for good. In some churches we have had those who claimed they had a telephone ministry. What they had was a gossip ministry. Speaking forth everything that comes to mind is unwise, poisonous speech.

13 Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

Now James makes a transition from discussing teachers and the tongue to dealing with wisdom's impact on everyone's life. He supports the truth that wisdom is divided into two parts, man's and God's. Wisdom, the kind that comes only from God, is a gift from God. Those who have this type of wisdom, show the world by their actions and their speech, they are believers.

14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

If you have this condition in your heart then you need to seriously check up on yourself. Contrast this condition of the heart with the fruit of the spirit that Christians are supposed to have in their hearts. You find this list, of the fruit, in Galatians chapter 5:vs 22 and following. **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, {5:23}**

Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. {5:24} And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the

affections and lusts. {5:25} If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. {5:26} Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another,

envying one another. Now, everyone in here, who is a born again Christian, should have all that are on that list. Be sure to notice that it is fruit singular. If, after examining yourself, you find that you lack some of the parts of the fruit then you should be working, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to get these in your life. That list of parts of the fruit has nothing to do with your salvation. It has everything to do with your Christian walk. That is the perfect description of the proper Christian life.

15 This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

Each of us has his own special place with Christ. He has not called us to the same job as someone else. We should never look at someone else and be jealous, or want what they have. To want something someone else has, even if it is their relation with Christ, is coveting. God called each of us to do a job for Him that He could trust us with.

16 For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

The natural man does not receive the things of God. Envy and strife are of the flesh. Envy, another word for coveting, causes many other sins. Christians are in this world, but we should not be controlled by earthly desires.

James 3:17 "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, [and] easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

“Pure”: This refers to spiritual integrity and moral sinc

17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

Notice how this perfectly parallels the fruit of the Spirit.

18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

In verses thirteen through eighteen James has shifted focus to wisdom and knowledge and how they are affected by the tongue. Wisdom and knowledge are different. Someone once described the difference between knowledge and wisdom in this way: “*Knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit, wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad.*” There are two kinds of wisdom discussed here heavenly and earthly. While they may both be called “wisdom”, they are completely different in motivation, nature and reward. One is a true wisdom that has an eternal reward while the other is folly disguised as wisdom that disappoints in the end. To put it another way, one is eternal reward while the other is wood, hay and stubble and will be burned up at the judgment seat of Christ.

JAMES CHAPTER FOUR

1 From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?

James is addressing church members, in particular those who are materialistic and jealous of others who have more. This leads to partiality toward members who have more and neglect of those who are poorer in material things. Notice that I said poorer in material things. The amount of “stuff” you have in no way determines your spirituality. Material possessions were an Old Testament blessing and are not related to New Testament spirituality. There are plenty of false teachers today who are fond of saying we can all be rich if we have enough faith. There is absolutely no NT scripture that supports this heresy. The jealousy and partiality spoken of here as war in our members is speaking of war in our person and not war among the church members. War in our person stops our spiritual growth.

2 Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.

Notice that if these James is addressing are really Christians then they are very worldly Christians. All of the things he lists here are reasons not to have prayers answered. There are rules to getting answers to your prayers.

3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

James is bothered more by the members selfish spirit and bitterness than by the rights and wrongs of the various viewpoints. He describes the various conflicts. Lust is a form of covetousness this and anger and animosity lead to conflict within the church. He refers to murder and that is meant to startle his listeners. It isn't likely that he is referring to actual murder but rather to the thought of murder as was stated in the Sermon on the Mount. James is trying to make his readers realize the depth of evil in their hearts. The reason these desires exist among Christians is because we are not seeking God for our needs, or, when we do ask, we ask God with purely selfish motives. We are regarding God as a cosmic Santa Claus and our prayers, like our desires, are self centered. God is not reluctant to do what we ask if we ask according to His will.

4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the

world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

This is a description of spiritual unfaithfulness. It would have been familiar to James' Jewish readers, since the Old Testament often describes unfaithful Israel as a spiritual harlot. These are professing Christians, who still hold on to the evil world system. Unfortunately this describes most modern day Christians. Now, keep in mind that adultery, or any type of fornication, is one of the worst sins a Christian could commit, because it is a sin of the body and the body is the temple of the indwelling Holy Spirit. This would be involving the Holy Spirit in the sin. Either the flesh, or the spirit, rules over our will. There is no middle ground.

5 Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?

Second Corinthians puts it this way. **"For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present [you as] a chaste virgin to Christ."**

6 But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

In verses four, five and six we are being warned against spiritual adultery. In other words, do not allow yourselves to become too much in love with the world. The Holy Spirit which dwells in us is grieved when we allow love of worldly things to replace our love for the things of God. Be sure to notice the warning against pride in verse six.

7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

The word submit was used of soldiers under the authority of their commander. It was also used to describe Jesus' submission to His parents' authority, submission to human government, the church's submission to Christ, and servants' submission to their masters. James used the word to describe a willing, conscious submission to God's authority as sovereign ruler of the universe.

8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

Drawing near to God is a personal thing. You draw near to God by three means. They are prayer, study of God's word and meditation. When I use the

term meditation I mean sitting quietly, with no distractions, thinking of the things of God and listening for His voice.

9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.

This is speaking of true repentance and that always brings God's mercy and forgiveness.

10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

Notice first that James says "resist" the devil. No where does he recommend casting out devils. Seven through ten are commands. Submit, draw near, cleanse your hands, mourn and humble yourselves. These commands bring us closer to God and this is done through prayer and meditation. Meditation is often overlooked by the modern Christian. My personal definition of meditation is time spent alone with God. Time not necessarily in prayer but in quietly thinking of the things of God and listening for His voice. Verse nine shows us that we should take times of prayer and meditation very seriously. Verse eight is not talking about washing your hands with soap and water but rather in cleansing yourself through confession of sin in prayer .

11 Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth 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 addresses brother and brethren here. There can be no doubt that this letter is addressed to believers. The "lawgiver" mentioned here is God Himself since he is the only one able to save and destroy. Again we are warned to be careful judging brethren. If this was the only scripture we had then we would be prohibited from judging brethren in any way. In light of other scriptures we know that there are times we must judge conduct. Judge the worlds conduct always but be careful when you judge the brethren and be doubly sure it isn't gossip.

13 Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:

James does not condemn wise business planning, but rather planning that leaves out God. The people described are living their lives and making their plans as if God did not exist.

14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your

life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

Scarey verse. It is a reminder of just how little time we have in this life. This is NOT a prohibition against planning ahead but rather a reminder that God is in charge. There is an old joke that says “if you want to give God a good laugh tell him your plans for tomorrow”.

15For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

It was arrogance in the case of both Lucifer and Adam that made them think that they could live and move independent of God. This boastful arrogance is the essence of sin: a proud independence, the root of all sin. In many cases this is our problem as well.

16But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.

17Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

Think about that cute saying;”if you have to ask if it is sin it is.”As the Holy Spirit shows us sin we are to accept that and act on it. For instance ,some Christians regard some things such as gambling,smoking and light social drinking as ok. BUT,if the Holy Spirit put it into your mind that any of these are sin, then,FOR YOU,it is a sin. Since there is no scriptural prohibition against the first two then it is entirely a personal matter as to whether it is sin or not. Now,if you do not do these things then don't think for a minute that you get to make the choice for your brethren. Let God do the convicting if that is his will. Final note about verse seventeen;yes,I know that many Christians incorrectly use the soldiers casting lots for the cloak of Jesus as a prohibition against gambling. Casting lots is not gambling. Gambling is risking something you have in hopes of getting something from someone else. I personally don't have a dog in that fight since I have never been much of a gambler even before I was saved. I will close by saying this. Gambling is a form of coveting what someone else has,so leave it alone. It can lead in the same direction as alcohol,drugs,pornography and gluttony. That direction is addiction,broken homes and bankruptcy.

JAMES CHAPTER FIVE

1 Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.

As James warned teachers in the last chapter now he turns his attention to the wealthy. He now rebukes those who live independently from God.

2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.

This rich man must have attained the riches in a corrupt manner. This would be a man who put his wealth ahead of everyone and everything. James points out the folly of hoarding food, expensive clothing, or money, all of which is subject to decay, theft, fire and other forms of loss.

3 Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.

James tells the rich to mourn in consideration of their destiny. In the life to come, their riches will be revealed as corrupted, moth-eaten and corroded. James has already condemned, heaping up earthly treasure in the last days, when they should have been heaping up treasure in heaven. This is a theme that occurs over and over in scripture.

4 Behold, the hire of the labourers 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 into the ears of the Lord of saboath.

Any one here who has done laborer type work has had to deal with cheating contractors. This is simply human greed and you can be sure that it is never overlooked by God.

5 Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter.

James gets specific as to the way the rich have cheated those who work for them. The day of slaughter refers to actual days when large amounts of animals are killed for food. Mankind always has a tendency to over eat at such times of plenty. The idea here is to contrast the plenty of the rich against the poverty of the poor. Though Jesus had some rich among His followers , Barnabas, Joseph of Armithea, and Zaccheus), these were few in number. Most of his followers were the very poor. Riches can be an obstacle for a Christian , and that the pursuit of riches is a motivation for every conceivable sin.

6 Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.

Often, those who are poor and without power in this world have little recourse to justice. But their cries are heard by God, who guarantees, ultimately, to right every wrong and answer every injustice.

7 Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.

This emphasizes patience with people, not trials or circumstances (as in 1:3). James seems to have in mind patience with the oppressive rich. This verse is also referring to the Second coming of Jesus Christ. Realizing what awaits them at Christ's return should motivate believers to patiently endure hardship. Here we are encouraged to wait patiently on the coming of the Lord.

8 Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

Keep in mind that patience is part of the fruit of the spirit. It is listed there as longsuffering. James recommends the same patience a farmer has as he plows, plants, weeds and waits for the harvest. He labors because he has faith that a harvest will come.

9 Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.

The term "grudge" is one we seldom use. In this case it means to murmur against other brethren.

10 Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.

Do not grumble against one another: Times of hardship can cause us to be less than loving with our Christian brothers and sisters. How many times have you been in a bad mood and snapped at one of the brethren, and remember that your spouse is one of the brethren. James warns us that we cannot become grumblers and complainers even though we are experiencing hardships. The phrase "the judge standeth before the door" shows us that Jesus comes to judge the world for sin, but also to judge Christians for their faithfulness.

11 Behold, we count them happy which endure. 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.

It may be hard to see the compassion and mercy of a loving God while we are going through serious trials. God has given us Job and Paul as examples of God's mercy even in times of severe tribulation. No matter how bad your life gets it is still so much better than the rough times these two men experienced.

12 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.

I take this to mean to be very careful when you make a vow. Some believe you should not swear to anything including to telling the truth in court. I think that is stretching the scripture a little too far. This passage echos Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. The need to swear or make oaths, beyond a simple and clear yes or no betrays the weakness of your word.

13 Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

This word “afflicted” has to do with trials other than sickness. That second part of the verse we can take exactly as it is written. If you are happy, sing a song.

14 Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

This has fallen out of favor with most modern churches and I fail to see why since it is prayer that brings the healing. Though God often heals through medicine, the use of oil here is mainly symbolic because; it is applied in the name of the Lord, it is the Lord who will raise him up. All believers in Christ should pray in the name of Jesus to heal the sick. It is the name of Jesus that heals the sick. It is very important for the person who is sick to call for prayer. This shows that he believes he can receive healing. Jesus said, when he healed, Your faith has made you whole. The anointing with oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit of God. This must be pure olive oil.

15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

The sick person should make sure they have confessed, to God, all known sin. Sometimes it is sin that has caused the sickness.

16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

The healing process here involves the elders of the church. Elders does not refer to actual age but to those leaders who are in that position due to spiritual maturity. This is NOT a gift of healing. God honors unity in prayer. It is the sick who must take the initiative here and I believe they must do so of their own will and not by being prompted by others. The oil carries no

supernatural power but is a symbol of the outpouring of God's Spirit. The phrase "in the name of the Lord" points to the real source of healing. Finally, the real key to healing is in the last sentence of verse sixteen. Notice too that this confession to each other is faults and not sins. We confess our sins only to God.

17 Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

This is spoken of in 1 Kings Chapters 17 and 18. It is very interesting that this covers a period of 3-1/2 years, exactly one half of the tribulation period.

18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

We are given the example of Elijah. His simple prayer, done in complete faith was enough to shut up heaven for three years. Public prayer is often, maybe usually, ineffective because it is done for man's ears and not earnestly directed to God.

19 Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; 20 Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

In other words, restore those who have strayed from the truth. By doing so you may save the sinner a lot of punishment from God and may even save him from death. James concludes with this because this is exactly what he has done throughout this letter - to confront those who have wandered from a living faith, by demanding that they not only hear the word, but work, because a living faith will have its proof by the work.