

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

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**THE BOOK OF JAMES
TABLE OF CONTENTS**

CHAPTER, TITLE, SCRIPTURE	PAGE
Dedication _____	a-
Chapter-01, Introduction _____	2-11
Chapter-02, Temptation, 1:2-3; 12-15 _____	12-21
Chapter-03, How to Ask God, 1:5-8 _____	22-27
Chapter-04, The Gifts of God, 1:16-18 _____	28-35
Chapter-05, Hearing, Speaking, and Agner, 1:19-20 _____	36-41
Chapter-06, Mirror, Mirror, On The Wall, 1:22-27 _____	42-49
Chapter-07, The Sin of Partiality, 2:1-8 _____	50-57
Chapter-08, The Two Ways of Salvation, 2:10 _____	58-65
Chapter-09, The Relation of Faith and Works, 2:14-26 _____	66-73
Chapter-10, The Use and Abuse of Speech, 3:1-12 _____	74-81
Chapter-11, Wisdom – Divine and Devilish, 3:13-18 _____	82-89
Chapter-12, The Cause of Hostility, 4:1-6 _____	90-97
Chapter-13, The Christian Relationship Toward God, Man and the Devil _____	98-105
Chapter-14, How to Live a "Here Today, Gone Tomorrow" World; God, Man and the Devil, 4:13-17 _____	106-111
Chapter-15, The Use and Abuse of Wealth, 5:1-6 _____	112-117
Chapter-16, The Art of Being Patient, 5:7-12 _____	118-125
Chapter-17, To Swear or Not to Swear, 5:12 _____	126-135
Chapter-18, The Church and Healing, P-1, 5:13-16 _____	136-143
Chapter-19, When Did Miracles Cease? P-2, 5:13-16 _____	144-151
Chapter-20, Does God Want Everyone To Be Healthy?, 5:13-16 P-3 _____	152-155
Chapter-21, The Treatment of the Sick. P-3, 5:13-16 _____	156-163
Chapter-22, Saving Souls and Covering Sins, 5:19-20 _____	164-171

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

In beginning the study of a book of the Bible, certain things must be kept in mind---certain questions the student must ask himself. Actually, this is true with regard to any book that a person might contemplate purchasing, reading or studying. For this example, suppose you go into a book store to select a new volume. There are several questions you will ask yourself---three to be exact, (1) Who is the author? (2) To whom is he writing? (3) What is the purpose of his writing? These same three questions are asked with relation to any book: fiction, nonfiction, textbook, scientific volume, religious writings, reference works, etc.

First the reader will want to know who is the author? Does he have a reputation? Is he well recommended? Is the man qualified to treat the subject? What is his style and his skill in communication? Is the book he has written necessary; that is, does it serve a purpose?

Secondly, for whom is the author writing? Does his work concern scholars, morons, reasonably well educated people, religious people, pagan degenerates? In other words, before you purchase his book, you want to be sure that it is written for you, and not for some group to which you do not belong. To illustrate: If I were to go into a book store and see a beautifully bound volume on "How To Feed and Care For Elephants," no matter how beautiful the book or its binding, it will not appeal to me. I do not own an elephant, nor do I have any desire to purchase one. Thus, the book will be of no value in my case. In the same way, before anyone invests in a book or begins to read it, he will want to make certain that its message is for him.

The third question in which the potential reader of a book will be interested is "why has the book been written?" That is, what was the author's purpose in producing the volume? Was it merely to make a name for himself? Is he attempting to fill a need which simply does not exist? Does he really offer a new approach to an old subject, or present some vital, important, hitherto untouched material?

These are also some of the questions that a Christian will want to ask whenever he begins the study of a new book of the Bible. Who is its author? To whom did he write, and Why? It will be our purpose to examine some of these matters in this opening chapter, before we begin our actual study of the epistle of James

I. THE AUTHOR

In the epistle of James, the author's name is placed at the beginning of the letter, as was customary in biblical times. Yet, this does not help us too much. For "James" was a common name. This would almost be like telling someone to find the phone number of John Smith in the New York City telephone directory. There are over seventy different "John Smiths" in the Manhattan phone book alone.

The writer of this epistle was a Jew who lived in Palestine and was well acquainted with the customs and the physical factors of the land. To see this all we need do is observe the writer's references. He calls Abraham "our father" (2:21). He uses the Greek word *sunagoge* from which we get the word synagogue (2:2), translated "assembly." He refers to the Old Testament idea of Gehenna (3:6), where the Greek equivalent is translated "hell." In chapter five verse four, the writer speaks of "the Lord of hosts" which is an Old Testament Jewish expression Yahweh *Tseba'oth*.

In addition to these, the author of this epistle makes reference to the "former and latter rains" (5:7), "the fig tree and olive tree" (3:12), and the hot, burning, withering heat (1:11). All of these are phenomena of Palestine which would definitely be known to a native of that land.

Yet, the question that faces us is: which "James" is this? There are four men in the New Testament who are called by that name. (1) a disciple of Jesus, the son of Alphaeus. This man was an obscure, un-distinguished individual, and could hardly be the James we seek. (2) One of the "sons of thunder," a brother of John, son of Zebedee. This man was a cousin of Jesus, since his mother, Salome, was Mary's sister. However, this James died as a martyr (Acts 12), and is not the author of the epistle we are about to study. (3) A man named "James" whom the King James Version calls "brother of Judas"! and the RSV, "father of Judas." Nothing more is known of this individual. (4) James, the Lord's brother. The Apostle Paul spoke of this "James" in these terms (Galatians 1:19). Personally, I accept this man as the author of the epistle of James and it is this position on which the material in this book will be based.

We must never forget that Jesus had brothers and sisters. The New Testament record makes this plain (Matthew 13:56). These brothers and sisters were either the children of Joseph by a former marriage, assuming Joseph was a widower when he married Mary (though there is no proof of this), or they were children of Mary and Joseph after she had given birth to Jesus. Let it be noticed that it cannot be demonstrated that Mary was perpetually virgin, as the Roman Catholic Church teaches. This is pure fiction and has no basis in fact. In fact, Matthew 1:25 would seem to corroborate this. If this is read in Phillips translation, the real sense of the Greek text is brought out more clearly: "Joseph married Mary, but had no intercourse with her until she had given birth to a son... "The

implication here is that, after she had given birth to Jesus, Joseph lived with Mary in the normal marital union, including intercourse and presumably the birth of children to their marriage.

It is true, of course, that the brothers and sisters of Jesus mentioned by the New Testament, were in reality His half brothers and half sisters. That is they were Joseph's children; Jesus was not. Yet, they were members of the same family circle and household. One of these brothers was James, the author of the epistle we are studying.

At first, these half brothers and sisters did not believe in Jesus as the Christ. . In John 7:5, we read "for even his brothers did not believe in him. In fact, His family members were somewhat alarmed at some of the things He was saying and doing, They came to Him on at least one occasion, endeavoring to persuade Him to give up His embarrassing "soap box oratory" and come home. It was even hinted that He was mentally disturbed (Mark 3:21). Actually, it was not until after Jesus' death and resurrection that His brethren believed on Him and this included James also. Some time in the interval between Christ's death and His ascension, His brethren were converted. With James, this may possibly have been when Jesus appeared to him in His resurrection body (1 Corinthians 15:7). We know this, because when the disciples of Jesus were gathered together in the upper room, prior to the day of Pentecost, Jesus brothers were there also--already converted, And James was among them!

James, you recall, the brother of our Lord and the author of this epistle, was the moderator of the first Church council at Jerusalem (Acts 15) The council was called concerning a dispute between the legalists and the exponents of grace in the first century Church. The legalists insisted that salvation was by grace plus the keeping of the law, The exponents of grace pointed out that salvation is by grace alone. Paul and Barnabas, the Church's two missionaries, went to Jerusalem to settle the matter and a council was called. A private session was held between Paul and Barnabas and the officials of the Church, and then an open session was called at which the entire local Church was in attendance.

Peter's bold stand on this occasion was commendable, for he asked a very pointed question: why try to force new converts to live by a legal code which has frustrated both us and our fathers before us? Paul and his associate, Barnabas, gave a missionary report of how the Lord had worked through them in the various places they had ministered.

After this, James gave the final summary and decision, as the moderator of the Church council. He pointed out that the Gentiles were not to be expected to keep the law. Only, out of courtesy, they were to be asked to abstain from certain things which would be a stumbling block to their Jewish brethren. Clearly, therefore, James had become a prominent figure in the early Church.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to notice that nowhere did James capitalize on the fact that he was a half brother of Jesus. Can you just picture how some of us would "lord it over" everyone if we had been a brother of Jesus? We would want to be chairman of the board of deacons, clerk of the session, assistant pastor, minister of fashionable churches or bishop. And, we would probably throw our weight around and use our relationship to Jesus in a most despicable way.

None of this was true of James, and this is most commendable. It shows a truly Christian spirit of humility. James simply styled himself "a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1) For himself, although Jesus was James' brother, he was far more... he was James' Lord.

Thus, in the opening statement of the epistle (v. 1), James gives our Lord his full title, "The Lord Jesus Christ." There is a political sin that is known as nepotism. It is something any sensible politician steers clear of. Nepotism is a showing of favors to relatives because of relationship, instead of merit. James probably never heard the term "nepotism," and yet he still wanted to avoid any indication that he was gaining prominence because of his half brother, Jesus. In other words, he did not use the "elder brother" routine.

In a way, I am always skeptical of religious people - even in our own day who want to "become chummy" with Jesus Christ, or who like to style Him as "our elder brother." His own followers who knew Him most intimately, never regarded Jesus as other than their Lord. A friend, yes. A loving, compassionate, understanding individual, yes. But always, this was on a higher level than that of man. So, while James could have said, "He's my brother, we grew up together," he never took advantage of this relationship. James considered himself "a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. "

Interestingly, our Lord's teachings must have made a deep impression on James, even before he came to a full knowledge of Christ. His epistle is full of allusions to Jesus' ideas, as well as indirect quotations. For example, in James 3: 12, the question is asked, "Can a fig tree yield olives, or a grapevine figs?" Jesus also asked a similar question, "Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?" (Matthew 7:16).

Furthermore, James pointed out "your riches have rotted, and your garments are moth-eaten. " (5:2). Our Lord said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume..." (Matt. 6: 19). James cautioned on the matter of swearing, "Do not swear, either by heaven or earth let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no'" (5:12). In the same way, Jesus said "Do not swear at all, either by heaven or by earth. Let what you say be 'yes' or 'no'" (Matthew 5:34).

Let us keep in mind the fact that James was not converted until after Jesus resurrection and these statements of Jesus were made during the time James was still unregenerate. When did he acquire these quotes and allusions? The answer is that quite possibly he was present in the home or the carpenter shop while Jesus expounded His ideas to His family members; as pointed out in Professor J. A. Robertson's book, *The Hidden Romance of the New Testament*. At the time, James probably resented these views bitterly, but the thoughts found their mark, even in his unconverted mind. Later, these buried views came to the surface for use.

Incidentally, there is a lesson here for us. Never underestimate the power of the Word of God, even on an unregenerate person. God's Word never returns void, but accomplishes His purpose in His way and time (Isaiah 55: 11). It is not possible to live near a person, or be closely associated with a person, or without some influence being wielded. Therefore, if we radiate the Person of Christ, if we saturate our minds with His Word, those who are associated with us will be influenced in spite of themselves. Even unconverted people will be affected by a genuine Christian life and witness.

Frequently, I have occasion to counsel people with regard to spiritual problems in person and through the mail. Some time ago, I received a letter from a woman who asked how she should act toward her unsaved husband, with the view to winning him to Christ. My advice to her is what I always issue under the same circumstances: "Be the best possible wife you can to him. Don't nag him about religion or joining the church. Concentrate on letting him see what Christ can do to make you the finest wife possible." This same advice the Apostle Peter gave under similar circumstances: "Likewise, you wives, be submissive to your husbands, so that some, though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives" (I Pet. 3: 1).

If one of Jesus' brothers could soak up enough truth with his unbelieving, antagonistic mind, so that later on he could quote and cite this truth in his letter, then surely our Christian influence on our unconverted associates will "pay off." God will see to this!

II. THE READERS

Now, we have discussed the author---who he was and his qualifications, etc., What about the readers? Who were the persons to whom James wrote this epistle? Verse one says, "To the twelve tribes in the dispersion" or as the King James Version renders it, the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad". Of course, we immediately recognize the Jewish flavor in the phrase "the twelve tribes." In biblical matters, "twelve tribes" always refers to the nation of Israel, as a people.

Originally, in the early days of their history, the Jews had been divided into tribes, based on the twelve sons of Jacob. This division into tribes took place in the land of Egypt while Israel was there first, as guests; then later, as slaves. Quite probably the Egyptians found such tribal division helpful for enforced slavery.

When it came time for the exodus, the people went forth as tribes, and their wanderings through the wilderness were done according to tribes. During the later united kingdom under Saul, David and then Solomon, the tribal concept all but disappeared. However, when the kingdom broke up after Solomon's death, there were two kingdoms, the northern kingdom composed of ten tribes (Simeon, Levi, Zebulun, Issachar, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph, Ruben and Dan) and the southern kingdom comprising two tribes (Judah and Benjamin).

In 722 B.C., the northern kingdom was led away into captivity by the Assyrians (Iraq/Syria), There was a complete loss of tribal identity during this exile. Similarly, in 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian armies (Iran/Iraq) descended on Judah and Benjamin and led the southern kingdom tribes into exile in Babylon. There, too, for all practical purposes, tribal identity was lost. Thus, today, no Jew can accurately trace his tribal history. Even in New Testament times, there seems to be little awareness on the part of the average Jew as to which tribe he belonged.

As a matter of fact, only two people in the New testament are identified by tribe. Anna the prophetess, who was of the tribe of Asher, and St. Paul who was of the tribe of Benjamin. This identification was made because they were in religious service. However, the average person had no such definite knowledge of his tribal history. Thus, when James wrote to the "twelve tribes of the dispersion," this was a general designation for Israel as a whole.

Our text tells us that James was writing to a dispersed, scattered people. They had been Jews, but now were converted to Jesus Christ and members

of His Church. The very fact that James calls them "brethren" attests this, Many of O these converted Jews had settled in various parts of the Roman Empire. Reports apparently had reached James of the sort of lives some of them were living, They were filled with pride, arrogance, selfishness, greed, and partiality. these things were governing their lives. Thus, they needed a few words of warning on matters of Christian ethics. This was, in part, the reason for the letter.

Incidentally, I think if we are honest with ourselves, we will probably admit that our own lives need a jogging now and then. Indeed, this is what the Apostle Peter had in mind when he wrote, "So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things" (2 Peter 1:12-15).

Actually of course, we should not need reminders to live for the Lord, But, unfortunately however, we do... frequently. What is it the hymn writer said?

"Tell me the story often
For I forget so soon.
The early dew of morning
Has passed away by noon."¹

¹ Katherine Henkey, "Tell Me the Old, Old Story" (1866)

III. WHY THIS EPISTLE?

What was the author's purpose in writing this letter? Of course, we realize he was led by the Holy Spirit to write. This was his principle motivation. Yet, humanly speaking, his goal or purpose was to bring a reminder to these believers, who were dispersed in many lands, that their Christianity was not "up to par." Their ethics were atrocious. Their love for others was sadly lacking.

How true this is in many Christian circles today. All too often, we Christians, particularly some of us who are conservative, evangelical, fundamentally based, seem to feel that all we need to do is to get people to "accept Christ" and get our young people to go into the ministry or the mission field. These things are important of course, but the Christian life involves much more.

The Bible is full of principles and regulations by which we need to govern our lives. Just as these first century converts needed to know the score on friction between believers, gossiping, character assassination, partiality, pride, spiritual adultery, so do we. We can benefit from these truths, This book is written to us, in the twentieth century, as much as to first century Christians.

Thus, it is my hope, that as we go through these coming chapters, we shall all take them to heart. In other words, before we say "Oh, that belongs to Mrs. So-and-So," we must ask ourselves could it possibly be that this truth applies to me?

For years, the liberal wing of Christendom has stressed Christian ethics, living the good life, moral character, loving your neighbor. We evangelicals have accused the liberals of meddling in ethics instead of salvation. It is true that the liberal school of thought within the Church has put the cart before the horse. They have emphasized good living without presenting the way of life in Christ which enables the person to live the moral life. However, unfortunately, we evangelical, fundamental Christians have gone to the opposite extreme We have bent every effort to get people to "accept Christ," and this is good, but we have failed to show our converts how to live the Christian life once they have entered it.

O Let's be very specific. You enter the average liberal church and you won't find much of salvation through Christ discussed there. But, you will find a wealth of helpful material on what a Christian should or should not do. You will hear sermons on how to live the Christian life, how to win friends and

influence people, how to be helpful to others and how to overcome bad habits. These things are important for living the Christian life.

On the other hand, you go to a solidly conservative, fundamental church. You find the "old-time gospel" preached - morning, noon and night. The sinner is constantly confronted with the message of salvation. But the Saints, the believing Christians, are rarely told in practical ways what is required of them in the Christian life. The sum and substance of the instruction given can be included as "go out and win souls," "be a witness for Christ," "give out tracts," and similar admonitions. .

Our studies in James in these coming chapters will treat some very practical issues. It is my hope that the suggestions offered will show us how big a job "living the Christian life" really is. The reader should turn these forthcoming pages with an expectation that their humdrum, smooth, routine life will be severely shaken. But, out of such a shaking will come a Christian life that is more firmly established upon the one solid foundation which is ours, Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER TWO TEMPTATION

James 1:2-4; 12-15

¹ James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greeting. ² Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:1-4 RSV).

¹² Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him. ¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God;" for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one; ¹⁴ but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death (James 1:12-15 RSV).

The subject of temptation is an important one because it is so universal. that is, no one is exempt. No matter where a person may be or go on the face of the earth, every culture, every nation, every tribe faces temptation. The sophisticated and the unsophisticated alike, the educated and the illiterate, all are well acquainted with temptation.

Then too, the study of the subject is important because temptation comes in so many different forms e Verse two speaks of "various trials. The word used for "various in Greek means many—colored or diverse. It is the same Greek word which the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament) uses for Joseph's "coat of many colors" (Genesis 37:3). Truly, our temptations do take on the appearance of "many colors." They are diverse, and different each day. Edmund Spenser, the sixteenth century English poet, wrote in his classic poem, *The Faerie Queene*:

"Ay me! How many perils do unfold
The righteous man, to make him daily fall!"

Surely all of us can echo Spenser's sentiments at this point. Therefore, a study of James practical evaluation of the theme of temptation should prove helpful.

I. THE SOURCE OF TEMPTATION

Where does temptation come from? Of course, we almost automatically point our finger of accusation at the devil. "He's the culprit! He did it! And, this is correct... at least partially so. For, the devil was once an angel, doing the will of God. His name was Lucifer and he was among the highest of the angelic creation. However, pride and arrogance rose up in Lucifer's heart. He said, "Move over God, here I am; I will be like You!"

In that instant of threatened insurrection and rebellion, Lucifer was expelled from God's presence, and he became Satan, the archenemy of God.

Immediately, he set about preparing himself for the task of tempting God's creatures to sin. Thus, in a very real way, Satan is the source of our temptations.

But, he has a lot of help. He has his demons, the angels who followed him in his rebellion against God. With great ease, he can dispatch a demon to handle his multitudinous duties. In addition, the devil has the help of two other powerful allies: the world and the flesh.

The Bible tells us that Satan is "*the god of this world!*" (2 Corinthians 4:4). This means that God has allowed the devil squatter's rights, and limited sovereignty over his ungodly subjects. John confirms this in his first epistle when he says, "*The whole world lies in the power of the evil one*" (I John 5:19). Thus, the world becomes the second source of temptations. Satan has the cooperation of his worldly subjects in any tempting he may wish to do. And, as we all well know, the temptations from the world can be most attractive and enticing.

The third source of temptation is within us... the flesh. This is with the old nature with which we were born, and with which we will have to contend throughout life. The flesh is permanently antagonistic to the spirit.

St. Paul put it this way: "*The desires of the flesh are against the spirit, and the desires of the spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other*" (Galatians 5:17).

It is interesting to note what effective allies the devil has in his program of temptation. One force, outside of us, performs its work on us from without; that is, the world. Another force, inside of us, engages in its activities on us from within; that is, the flesh.

Actually, this is almost a foolproof setup. If it were not for the power of God available to us, we would be fighting a losing battle against temptation since the devil has allies within and outside of us. But, God has already won the victory over Satan at the cross. And, if we will only do so, we may enter into the benefits of this victory day by day, through faith.

However, before passing along, we must mention another source of temptation which oftentimes is overlooked. That is, God! For, in Genesis 22:1, the text clearly says, *"It came to pass, after these things, that God tempted Abraham."* The temptation from God was in the form of a command. Abraham was to take his son Isaac, his only son whom he loved, and offer him to God as a burnt sacrifice. Unquestionably, this was a very real temptation, for Abraham loved Isaac, but he also loved the Lord. What, therefore, should he do?

In the light of this, we cannot overlook verse 13 of our text which says, *"Let no one say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God"* for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one. In order to understand this matter, we must consider the second main point in our study.

II. THE NATURE OF TEMPTATION

In verse 2, the Greek word translated "trials" (temptations in the K.J.V.) is a flexible word. For, after all, the whole idea of temptation is a flexible concept. Some have tried to make a distinction between "temptation" and "trial," but, for all practical purposes, there is no distinction. Our trials are temptations; our temptations are trials. Satan can try us severely, and God can tempt us sorely, as He did with Abraham for example.

There is one major difference, however. Satan's motives in tempting us or trying us, however good or kind they may seem, are always ultimately evil. On the other hand, God's purposes, when He tries us or tempts us, however harsh or cruel they may seem at the time, are always for our ultimate good. To put it very simply, Satan's final goals are invariably evil. God's ultimate intentions are always good. Unfortunately, we are too often interested in the immediate results, and forget that God builds for eternity... slowly and effectively.

Let us think of a situation which will show the difference between God's temptations and the devil's trials. Here's a boy whose parents recognize early that he has a remarkable musical talent. They arrange for piano lessons and insist that he practice consistently. The boy, like most boys, hates to practice piano and take lessons. He would far rather be out playing with his friends. To him, piano practice is a trial, an annoyance. And his parents sometimes have to tempt him to practice, sometimes through rather stringent means. On the other hand, this same fellow meets an older boy who is the leader of one of the juvenile gangs. The gang leader attempts to get the boy to join his gang, He offers all sorts of delightful, attractive incentives to the boy in an effort to tempt him to join. You see, in the one case, the temptations of the parents to get the boy to practice piano may seem unpleasant, annoying, even cruel to the boy... a real trial. Yet, his parents have his future career at heart and his ultimate good.

Conversely, while the temptations of the gang leader may seem most enticing and alluring to the boy, the gang leader's motives are not for the boy's good, but for his ultimate evil. This same thing is true with regard to God's temptations and Satan.

But now, let's look at verse 14, where James outlines the technique of temptation. *"Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire."* What James is actually saying is that temptation takes place when a person's desires are stimulated. When this happens, two things occur: (1)

the victim is drawn out of his comparative safety, and (2) he is given a strong incentive to sin.

If you analyze every instance of temptation and sin you know of in yourself, or in others, you will see that this has been the devil's technique. The potential victim must be drawn out of the shelter and temporary protection of a well-guarded life. In other words, he must be caught off guard. Then, once his guard is down, the lethal blow can be struck.

You recall, how, when Satan approached Eve in the Garden of Eden, he used this very same method. Eve had been living in the sheltered seclusion of a close walk with God. Therefore, Satan had to draw her out of this protective area, and render her vulnerable to his attack. This he did when he said, *"Tell me, Eve, did God really say that you could not eat of the fruit of these trees?"*

The seeming innocence of the question threw Eve off guard, and drew her out of her shelter, at least for the moment. She was something like an animal which the hunter lures out of its cave towards the trap which has been set for it. Incidentally, this Greek word for "draw away" is used in secular writings to describe such hunting tactics.

Once the devil had drawn Eve out of her protective shell, he hit her with both barrels of his deceptive lying shotgun. Eve was so flustered that she believed what the devil said: *"You will not die if you eat the fruit!"* (Genesis 3:4).

Perhaps you remember that the same thing also happened in the case of Job. God had put a protective hedge about him so that the devil could not get at him. And the devil said, *"Let down the hedge... so that I can get at him... and he will sin; you'll see!"* (Job 1:10). Once the hedge was lowered, Satan let loose his barrage: pillage, fire, death, plague of boils, loss of property. It's the same story: lure the victim out of his protection and then blast him with the temptation.

So it is in every instance in which we are tempted. There is the outward stimulus that appeals to our old natures. And, because our old natures are inherently sinful, we respond to the stimulus, and the cycle of sin has started. James uses the figure of speech of human birth to illustrate the cycle of temptation (v. 15). He says that *"desire conceives and gives birth to sin."* Then, sin grows up and has its own offspring; and this offspring is death. Clearly, death is the grandson of desire. What a terrible, ugly "family tree."

III. HOW TO MEET TEMPTATION

Our text suggests two ways in which temptation can be met when it reaches us. (1) Temptation can be met with joy (v. 2). *"Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials."* Of course, this is easier said than done. I suppose it would seem rather strange for us to jump up and down with joy when the trials and the temptations of life strike us. Here is a someone who loses his job and immediately shouts "Oh happy day!" Or, a hits his finger with a hammer while trying to place a picture on the wall, and shouts *"Praise the Lord!"* Ordinarily, this would seem absurd. But James offers a reason why the Christian can rejoice in temptation, *"You know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness"* (v. 3).

Most of are so conditioned that we can put up with almost anything, provided: (1) we know there will be an end to it and (2) we know something good will come of it. Thus, for example, a child can endure the pain of the dentist's drill if he knows that it's only going to last ten minutes, and his toothache will go away once the tooth is fixed.

An adult can put up with the pain of surgery if he knows he will only be hospitalized for two or three weeks, and will be in good health there after. A nation can tighten its belt in time of war and endure sacrifices, if it knows that the war will be soon over and perhaps peace will come.

So, our text tells us that we ought to accept temptations and trials with supreme joy, because *"the testing of your faith produces steadfastness"* (v. 3). In other words, God is working His will in us, even through the trials of life. In this connection, Romans 8:28 still stands true, *"And we know that [k]God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."*

In other words, God is working His will in us, even through the trials of life. In this connection, Romans 8:28 still stands true.

Therefore, we meet life testing times with joy, however difficult that may seem, because our Christian lives are enriched and strengthened thereby. So, the next time some temptation or trial comes your way, naturally you will not clap your hands gleefully and say, "Oh! How wonderful! How nice I am being tempted! Tra-la! Tra-la!" But, inwardly you can rejoice in the Lord's faithfulness, knowing that "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your endurance (I Cor. 10:13). Like the first century apostles, you can rejoice that you are counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus Christ.

The second way in which we are to face temptation and trial is "with blessing."
"Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when I he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him"
(v. 12).

God will always honor those who are faithful to Him. Thus, we may face all of the devil's fiery darts, knowing that the Lord is blessing us as we are true to Him

IV. THE RESULT OF TEMPTATION

When we consider the result of temptation in our lives, the text tells us it is two-fold: (1) maturity for the present, and (2) a crown of life... later on.

In verse 4, we are told that life's trials and temptations will make us "perfect" and "complete." The word for "perfect" suggests maturity - the state of being an adult or a grownup. A mature person is one who is not only grown up in years, but in experience, having faced what life has to offer. So, when we have faced, and successfully conquered, temptation, we are mature Christians, complete, lacking nothing.

One of the finest ways in which a Christian can face and conquer temptation is to come to grips with one trial at a time. So often, we try to cross our bridges before we reach them, or worry about tomorrow's temptations before they arrive. The point is that the true child of God will want to meet each temptation and conquer it before he goes on to the next. This is the proper procedure. As a matter of fact, the old hymn reminds us of this technique:

"Yield not to temptation
For yielding is sin;
Each victory will help you
Some other to win."¹

And this is true! Every victory over sin that the Christian gains, will strengthen him that much more to face the next trial of life.

However, there is a crown waiting at the Judgment Seat of Christ in the future. James says, *"Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him"* (v. 12). The words *"when he has stood the test"* look off into the future, to the time when the believer will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ (Romans 14:12). There, his life and works since he has become a Christian will be brought before the penetrating gaze of Christ and he will either be "approved" or "disapproved." Naturally, this has nothing to do with the Christian's salvation, but only with the rewards or lack of rewards for his eternal home. To use a figure of speech, our eternal home has been guaranteed to us by God's grace, totally apart from anything we have ever done or could do. But how this "home" will be furnished will depend largely upon our manner of living since we have been saved. The rewards can be thought of as the "furnishings" for our eternal home. Literally, the words of

¹ "Yield Not to Temptation," H. R. Palmer (1868)

verse 12 "*stood the test*" translate the Greek word *dokimos* which means "approved."

When the Lord will allow His gaze to sweep over all of our works at the Judgment Seat of Christ. If our works and Christian living have been up to par, we will "stand the test" or be "approved. Do you remember that one of St. Paul's greatest fears was that something in his life might disqualify him at the Judgment Seat of Christ in some way. Thus he wrote, "*I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after having preached to others, I myself should be disapproved*" (I Corinthians 9:27). The word "*disapproved*" is the exact opposite of "stand the test" (Gk. *adokimos*). Surely, the child of God will watch his manner of living closely, so that, before the Judgment Seat of Christ, they will be able to "stand the test" with the approval of God.

After all, here is the real motive in facing temptation. We are not to endure trials with a stoical, "grin and bear it" attitude. We are not to be like William Ernest Henley, who wrote the *Invictus*² as a sort of personal testimony: .

"Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole;
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance,
I have not winced nor cried aloud;
Under the bludgeoning's of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this veil of wrath and tears
Looms but the horror of the shade,
And yet, the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how straight the gait,
How charged with punishment the scroll;
I am the master of my fate
I am the captain of my soul!"

This can never be the Christian's attitude: This is a human stoicism that knows nothing of a sovereign God ruling over the affairs of men and caring for those who are committed to Him. Rather, the Christian willingly endures

² William Ernest Henly, "Invictus," (1875)

all of the trials and temptations of life, because he loves the Lord Jesus Christ and wants to give Him his very best.

So, whenever the trials of life confront and surround us, let us look to Christ and know that in Him is our victory. Through Him, we may conquer all of Satan's attacks.

CHAPTER THREE HOW TO ASK OF GOD

James 1:5-8

⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ^{7, 8} For that person must not suppose that a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways, will receive anything from the Lord.

The subject of prayer is a never ending field of inquiry. So much can be said about prayer that obviously not everything can be covered within the confines of this one study. However, let us try to treat the phases of prayer that are indicated by the text. You will note that verse 5 particularly mentions "*wisdom*" as a subject for prayer: "*If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask...*" But, while we may certainly ask for wisdom, our requests need not be confined to this alone. That is, it would be possible to ask for anything at all that would be consistent with Christian holiness.

Thus, the main idea here is not that, if we lack wisdom we can ask God for it. That's true of course. But, the main thrust of the text suggests that if we lack anything at all that we need, we have a right to ask God for it.

In the previous verse (v. 4), James outlined the Christian's goal, "*that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.*" Then, building on that thought, he went on to say, "But, if in your endeavor to become mature and complete, you do lack something," then ask God for it.

Now, of course, there is more to prayer than just asking God for things. Unfortunately, all too often, our prayers become little more than "gimmie sessions." "Lord, gimmie this, gimmie that, gimmie some thing else. We need to realize that true prayer incorporates adoration, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, and petition. Then too, there are a whole host of restrictions governing prayer. Indeed, someone has pointed out that the Bible contains far more assurances that God will not answer prayer than that He will.

It simply is not possible to go charging into God's presence, demanding things to satisfy our own selfish, personal whim. Later on in this epistle, James makes this crystal clear when he writes, "*you ask, but do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions*" (James 4:3).

If the things for which we ask are simply to gratify personal desire, we are wasting our breath in asking God to supply them. Let us not forget that we are to ask all things "in the name of Jesus Christ." To do that means more than adding the phrase "in Jesus: name" to the tail end of our prayers like a good luck charm or a rabbit's foot or Aladdin's lamp .

To ask something "in Jesus name" is the same thing as if we were Jesus Christ standing before the heavenly Father. The Father would certainly never refuse any request of His Son, because the Son would never ask anything which deserved refusal. So, when we ask something "in Jesus' name," it must be the type of thing Christ Himself would ask. If not, then it is not being asked in Jesus name, even though we may use the phrase to add piety to our petitions.

In addition, when we pray, we must always pray in accordance with the will of God. To do this, we must be very familiar with those biblical principles which tell us how to discern the will of God.

And, of course, we dare not ask God for anything if there is any unconfessed sin in our lives. In Psalm 66:18, we read, " if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." So, insofar as possible, our lives must be free from known sin when we pray, if we expect to receive an answer.

Now, with all of this in mind, we discover that God has given us some further prayer principles in this text in James. We can divide the text as follows: **(1) if anyone lacks; (2) let him ask of God; (3) let him ask in faith; (4) let him ask without doubting.**

(1) If Anyone Lacks

Perhaps our lack should go without saying. Surely, everyone is aware that he is lacking in many areas of life. Yet, before God fills our lack, there is going to have to be a personal acknowledgment of it. He will not force His bounties and blessings on us. We have to acknowledge the existence of a lack. And, I might add, it must be a legitimate lack—not just an expression of a desire. In Philippians 4:19, we are assured that "God will supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. But remember, He will supply our need; not necessarily our wants or desires. And, if you read the context of Philippians 4:19, you will see that the lack, or need, existed in the lives of these Philippians because they had been giving so much to the Lord. In such cases, where our lack is caused by our faithfulness to God, we may ask God and know with certainty that He will supply the lack.

(2) Ask God

The second step in the process of filling the lack in our lives is to ask God. Perhaps this may almost seem superfluous to say and unnecessary to do. Someone may ask, "Doesn't God know of our lack and need? If so, why does He expect us to come to Him and ask?"

Of course, God does often supply without our asking, We have the necessities of life such as air, water, protection, and health given to us by His divine grace without the necessity of our asking for them (Matthew 6:8).

Several years ago, a man asked me if I thought that God withholds things from His people because they do not ask Him for them, even though He knows they need these things. Naturally, I cannot psychoanalyze God. I do not know how He will act in every given situation. But, in the fourth chapter of this epistle, we have one answer to the question. James says, "you do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2). As clearly as anything can be said, this verse tells us, that on at least some occasions, we do not receive certain of God's benefits because we do not ask Him for them.

Oh, how we need to realize that God delights in our fellowship... perhaps much more than we delight in fellowship with Him. This is one of the wonders of sovereign grace: that the eternal God would be willing to "go slumming" among sinful humans such as we. He desires us to fellowship with Him, to ask Him for things, since He is "the giver of every good and perfect gift" (v. 17).

Our text says "He gives to all liberally, without reproaching" (v. 5). Note particularly that phrase, "without reproaching." The King James Version renders it "and upbraideth not."

Actually, the Greek word means without censure, criticism, or a slur. How often it is that benefactors keep on reminding their beneficiaries of how good they are. For example, an employer gives his workers a raise in salary, and for six months afterward, they must constantly listen to him as he says, "Don't you think you ought to work harder? After all, I did give you a raise, you know."

Or, sometimes a parent continues to remind his child of what he has done for him: "I'm surprised at you, son! After all I've done for you. To think that you would do such a thing!"

Actually, of course, with a harping, grudging attitude like that, a gift is not a gift; it's a loan, with high interest rates that never seem to be paid off. James assures us that God never treats His children like that. He gives "generously, without reproaching" (v. 5).

Jesus gave a further assurance along this line in His great Sermon on the Mount. *"Ask and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, it will be opened. What man of you, if his son asks him for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him?"* (Matthew 7:7-11) .

(3) Ask In Faith

The third step in having our lack taken care of by God, is to ask in faith. Sometimes, we hear the saying, "He stepped out on blind faith," or occasionally, "faith" is defined as "a shot in the dark." However, all such talk is nonsense. The Bible knows nothing of this vague, nebulous sort of faith.

During Jesus earthly ministry, He often spoke of faith. Sometimes, He praised a person for the depth of his faith. For example, the Roman centurion who pleaded with Jesus concerning his paralyzed slave was commended with these words, "Nowhere in Israel have I seen such faith as in this Roman" (Matthew 8:10). On other occasions, Jesus blamed His followers for their "little faith" He urged men to have faith like a grain of mustard seed which can grow quickly and to great extent. And, He assured two blind men that their healing would be "in proportion to their faith." So, if we would enter into the fullness of our Lord's work, we must know what it is to "have faith in God."

One of the finest descriptions of faith is that given by the writer of the book of Hebrews. In Hebrews 11:1, we are told that *"faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."* The Greek word for "assurance" literally means an undergirding structure; a foundation; something which upholds the superstructure. This is what faith really is. Not a shot in the dark; not chance; not just a good guess. Faith is the solid structure that enables us to walk unafraid in our daily lives. We walk fearlessly because we know that the everlasting arms of God are beneath us to uphold us and sustain us. We can do this because of our faith in the Person of Jesus Christ. Thus, our foundation in Christianity is just as strong as He.

This is what the Apostle Paul meant in I Corinthians 3:11, "*No other foundation can anyone lay, than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*"

However, Hebrews 11:1 also says that "*faith is the conviction of things not seen.*" The Greek word translated "conviction" actually means a method of proof. For example, suppose a man comes to you holding a glass bottle in his hand. He boldly declares that the liquid in the bottle will burn a hole in solid metal. You have doubts, so you ask him how he knows it will. What proof does he have? In reply, he uncaps the bottle and pours a few drops on a slab of metal, Instantly, the acid eats into the metal and burns a hole through it.

The method of proof, therefore, is action. Putting the Liquid to work proves what he says it will do. So, if someone asks me whether my faith in Christ is able to do anything for him, I tell him of the finest proof possible - putting faith to work. So, faith is the undergirding or foundation we have in Christ that enables us to walk in Him with utter confidence. But, it is also our certainty, or proof, of the reality of our life in Christ. For, when faith is put to work, we can easily see how real and significant Christianity is. Thus, when we pray to God, let us ask Him for things with this same type of guaranteed faith... faith in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(4) Ask Without Doubting

The final step in getting rid of our lack is to ask God without doubting. James tells us that the doubting man "*is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind*" (v. 1:6). Some time ago, I was riding on the famous Staten Island Ferry (the longest ride in the world for five cents). While waiting for the boat to pull out of the slip, I stood up front and looked over the railing at the choppy waters below. A piece of driftwood was floating between the ferryboat and the pilings, Every time a wave would come in towards shore, the driftwood would be carried along with its surge. Then as the wave would hit the dock, the backwash would carry the driftwood out again. As I watched this, I recall thinking of this sixth verse, "*The doubter is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.*"

The man, woman or young person who wavers between loyalty and dependence upon the Lord, and loyalty to and dependence on the world, is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed. Flatly, James says, "*Let not that sort of person think that he shall receive anything from the Lord.*" (v. 7).

I think there is something we all need to learn about Christian discipleship. The Lord is not much interested in halfhearted followers. The "double minded" person (v. 8) is unstable, and a questionable asset to the kingdom

of God. Later, in our study of James, we will notice that this divided loyalty, this "friendship with the world," is enmity against God. And who of us can afford to be at enmity with God? Figures of speech are interesting. We speak of an untrustworthy person who talks out of both sides of his mouth to different people, as a "two-faced" individual. James referred to such a person as "double minded," literally, "two-souled."

In the Old Testament, the psalmist used an interesting figure in Psalm 12:2, 2, we read "Help, Lord; for there are no longer any who are godly; the faithful have vanished from among the sons of men. Everyone utters lies to his neighbor; with flattering lips and "a heart and a heart" do they speak." The description, "a heart and a heart" suggests that one heart is good and the other evil, pulling in opposite directions . Thus, we can speak of a two-faced person, a double minded individual, or a two-hearted character. God will never use such a person who tries to divide his loyalty between the Lord and the old nature. Clearly, the demands of the Lord for those who would be His followers have been laid down: "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind and strength,*" and "*thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*" And again, "*If anyone would be my disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.*" High standards? Yes! But because He has given His best for us, He has a right to ask for our best in return.

CHAPTER FOUR THE GIFTS OF GOD

James 1:16-18

¹⁶Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. ¹⁷Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures." James 1:16-18

In our last study, we noticed that "God gives generously, and without reproaching" (v. 5). We said that the words "without reproaching" literally suggest that God gives His gifts, and then lets go. He does not have strings attached to His gifts, so that He can keep a hold on His people by means of them.

You who have pets, cat or a dog, perhaps have teased the animal on occasion with some food. You hand the food to the animal and, just as it is about to dive for the morsal, you snatch it away and say, "Sit up!" or "Speak!" Or possibly you make the animal follow you around the room while you keep dipping the food low within reach and then snatching it away.

Well, some people seem to think God is like that. He gives us a gift, and just as we are about to enjoy it, snatches it away saying, "You've got to be a better Christian before I'll give it back. Do this, do that, do something else, and then I will really give you my gifts." However, this is unworthy of God. He is far above such picayune actions. He gives generously and does not reproach. Or, to use common parlance, He is not what people generally call "an Indian giver."

The Bible tells us that "the gifts of God are without repentance" (Romans 11:29). This simply means that God never regrets what He has given or asks for it back again. He who knows the end from the beginning always gives only those things which are for our good and His glory.

Well, our text in this chapter sheds some additional light on God's methods and motives in giving. The seventeenth verse tells us **four things** about God's gifts: **(1) they are good, (2) they are perfect, (3) they are from above, (4) they come down from the Father.**

(1) THEY ARE GOOD

Surely, I do not have to point out that every gift of God must be good. Goodness is one of the attributes or characteristics of God. He is goodness in His very nature, and all true goodness in the world has its source in God. This is why St. Paul wrote, "*The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness...*" (Gal. 5:22). Consequently, if God by His very nature is good, it logically follows that His gifts to man will also be good. Thus, our text speaks of the "good gifts" which we receive at God's hand.

(2) THEY ARE PERFECT

Everything God creates, He makes for perfection. Note the way that statement is phrased: "Everything God creates, He makes for perfection." We cannot say that God's creation is perfect now, for it is not. The marks of imperfection are all about us: Sickness, crowded hospitals, death, vicious animal natures, mongoloid births, desert areas, floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, weeds, and a host of other factors. These and hundreds of other examples scream at us of the imperfection of God's creation.

But, of course, we know two things about this imperfection. (a) it was caused by the entrance of sin into the world. You remember how God cursed not only the human race because of sin, but the animal and vegetable kingdoms as well (Genesis 3:14-19).

(b) The other thing we know about the present imperfection in God's creation is that it is not permanent, God will one day overrule the curse He imposed. Then, the desert shall blossom as the rose, the vicious natures of wild beasts will be completely changed. Isaiah put it this way, "*The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid... the lion shall eat straw like the ox...*" (Isa. 11: 6-ff).

The same God who imposed the curse on His creation, making it imperfect, will remove that curse and restore perfection to His created handiwork. Indeed, St. Paul assures us that the creation of God is eagerly anticipating that day: "*The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God... For the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay. The whole creation has been groaning in travail until now... waiting for... the redemption.*" (Rom. 8:19ff). So, our text can well speak of "God's perfect gifts." Even if they appear to have imperfections now, all of God's gifts are made for perfection.

(3) THEY ARE FROM ABOVE

God's gifts are not only good, and perfect, but they are also "from above" and they "come down from the Father." Someone has pointed out that it is not from the lowest, but the highest points that the best things in the world always come. Light, heat, rain, clouds, all come from the sky and the air. The tall mountains furnish the cool, refreshing streams So also, the finest gifts God ever gave the human race - His Son - came from above, from the Father.

(4) THEY COME DOWN FROM THE FATHER

It is with the next term that we come to a most interesting section of our text. God is styled "*the Father of lights*" (v. 17). In fact, the Greek text makes it even more emphatic : "the Father of the lights."

Clearly, this is a reference to the heavenly bodies: the sun, the moon, the stars, the planets. James plainly declares that God is not fickle, vacillating or undependable. He does not say one thing one day and something else another time. As we are told in Hebrews 13:8, the Lord "*is the same yesterday, today and forever.*" In order to prove his case, James used two terms from astronomy: "variableness" and "shadow of turning." It must be understood at this point that the Bible is not a scientific textbook. That is, it cannot be expected that the modern scientific knowledge that we have today should be contained in the pages of this ancient book, the Bible. Yet, wherever the Bible speaks on science or scientific themes, it does so accurately, even though not in modern terminology. Thus, the terms "variableness" and "shadow of turning" describe astronomic phenomena that are quite accurate. Indeed, there is a third such term in verse 16, where James says "do not be deceived." The Greek word for "deceived" is *planasthe*, from which we derive the word "planet." The Greeks thought of a planet as a "wandering" or "erring" star - off its course. So, the word for "planet" gradually became associated with "being off course" or being deceived. For this reason, in verse 16, James says, "*do not be off course, my brethren!*" That is, don't get "out of orbit."

"But now, look at the statement, "*with whom is no variableness,*" speaking of God. Literally, this reads "in the presence of Him there can be no variation."

The word "variation" is fascinating. It paints a magnificent picture of God's faithfulness. The Greek word translated "variation," gives us the scientific term parallax. This word describes the apparent change in the position of an object, caused by the actual change in the viewer's position. For example, when you enter the door of the sanctuary of a church, you may look down the aisle and see the minister standing in the pulpit or lectern. As you stand at the narthex or entrance to the sanctuary, you see the minister from one angle. If later on, you were to sit in the third row from the front, you would

see the minister from a different angle. Or if you were to choose a seat in the balcony, you would view him from still a third angle. Now, it might appear that the minister had shifted position since he looks different from each viewpoint. But actually, the apparent change in his position would be due to your different viewpoints. Thus, this apparent change in an object's position, scientists call a parallax. This is the very word James used to describe the apparent change in God.

But, James scoffs at the very idea. All good gifts come down from the Father of the heavenly lights, and there can be no parallax - no apparent change or shifting in His position. Again, He is the same yesterday, today and always.

But, the text goes one step farther. Not only can there be no apparent change in God, there is no actual or real change either. Thus, we read, "*in his presence there is no shadow caused by turning*" (v. 17). This is another illustration from astronomy.

We all know what an eclipse is. The heavenly bodies move about in orbit out in space. The planets turn about the sun. The satellites or moons of planets revolve about the individual planets themselves, and the moon turns about the earth. Now, when one of these bodies comes between the earth and the sun, its shadow is thrown on the earth. That is, when the moon comes between the earth and the sun, its shadow may be cast over the earth. Similarly, if the earth, as it turns in its orbit about the sun, comes between the moon and the sun, the earth's shadow is cast on the moon. Naturally, the dark shadow is only temporary, and very brief, but it is a real and observable change.

James uses the technical language to describe an eclipse; he calls it "*a shadow caused by turning*" (v. 17). And, he emphatically assures us that not even such a transient, passing shadow can happen with God. He does not change with turning - He is constant, dependable, reliable. Clearly, therefore, no change - neither an apparent shift in position (or parallax), nor an actual, shadowy change, can ever be found in Him. Oh! How grateful we ought to be that our God is firm, unshakeable - like a rock!

In a beautiful descriptive passage, the psalmist pointed out how God's creation grows old and decrepit, but that God Himself does not change.

*"Of old thou didst lay the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of thy hands.
They will perish, but thou dost endure;
they will all wear out like a garment.*

*Thou changest them like raiment,
and they pass away;
but thou art the same,
and thy years have no end" (Psalm 102:25-27).*

And again, through Malachi the prophet, God said: "I am the Lord, I change not (Malachi 3:6).

Do you recall the words of that hymn which has become a favorite of so many:

*"Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father ;
There is no shadow of turning with Thee ;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not;
As Thou has been, Thou forever shalt be."*

Truly, God's gifts to us are magnificent! And of course, the greatest gift of all has been the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is this gift that verse 18 talks about. *"Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures."*

Very briefly, let us consider this text under four headings: **(1) the action;** **(2) the source;** **(3) the means;** and **(4) the purpose.**

(1) THE ACTION

The text (v. 18) says that "God brought us forth." I think we must never lose sight of the fact that the new birth was and is God's responsibility. Just as our physical birth took place without our action or effort, but entirely through the action of our parents, so our spiritual birth took place through the action of our divine parent, God.

The text says that He brought us forth; He gave us birth and life; He brought us into eternal life.

So frequently, we talk about what we did to become children of God. What we really need to see is that His divine quickening work initiated our salvation experience. We do not "bear ourselves" - we are born. So, we do not bring ourselves to God, we are brought by God Holy Spirit. Remember Jesus words, *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him"* (John 6:44) and *"It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail"* (John 6:63) .

(2) THE SOURCE OF THE NEW BIRTH

We read "of his own will," He brought us forth. I'm afraid we give all too little thought to the place of the divine will in our salvation. We constantly are talking about the role we play. We say, "I came to Christ, accepted Him, I believed in Him." Now, all of this may be fine. But, There is no question that we did enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Certainly, we did make a commitment to Him. However, do not forget Paul's words in Romans 9:16 *"it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy."* At times, we are so prone to quote John 1:12, *"to all who receive him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God."* Certainly, this is true. We did receive Jesus Christ, we did believe in His name. But, we forget the context of verse 13 which says **"[we] were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."** You see, we were born again, not "of blood" - that is, family relationships. We were not born again "of the will of the flesh" - that is, self-assertion. We were not born again "of the will of man" or ecclesiastical pronouncements. But, we were born of God. This is what James means when he says *"of his own will he brought us forth."* Let us never forget this.

(3) THE MEANS OF THE NEW BIRTH

In James 1:18, we read that God gave us the new birth *"by the word of truth."* In the process of human birth, the male sperm or seed is deposited in the womb of the mother-to-be. As it comes into contact with the female ovum, the first stages of birth take place, This same process is duplicated spiritually in connection with the new birth. For the seed that is deposited in the womb of faith, is the Word of God. Peter tells us, *"you have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable through the living and abiding word of God "* (1 Pet. 1:23).

In the same way, James tells us that the Word is *"implanted"* or *"deposited"* (Jas. 1:21b). Deliberately, with a set resolute purpose - of His own will. God takes His Word and using it as seed, impregnates our faith. The result is the new creation of a new nature within us. This is the new birth, by which we become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:10).

(4) THE PURPOSE OF THE NEW BIRTH

Whatever God does includes a divine purpose. In connection with the new birth, we are born again so *"that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creation"* (1:18).

In the Old Testament, there was a law of the first fruits. The first fruit of the womb - *i.e.*, the first-born son, was to be set apart for the Lord. The first fruits of grain, crops, produce and cattle were to be dedicated to the Lord. In

a similar sense, we Christians are the first fruits of God's act of redeeming grace in the new birth. And, because of this we too must be dedicated to the Lord.

Oh that we might realize that we belong to the Lord! We have been brought into His family by the new birth, through the greatest gift possible. Let us be willing to give our best to Him in gratitude and love.

CHAPTER FIVE
HEARING, SPEAKING AND ANGER
James 1:19-20

¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brethren. Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, ²⁰ for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God (James 1:19-20).

We come, in this chapter, to a discussion of three subjects that, at first glance, may not seem to be particularly related: hearing, speaking and anger. Perhaps we can see the relationship between hearing and speaking, but what on earth does anger have to do with them. Yet, our text links the three together.

Actually, it is strange the way the Word of God ties together seemingly diverse subjects, almost as if to tell us that even the most irreconcilable items must come under the Lordship of Christ. Sometimes, we Christians have a habit of dividing our lives into two watertight compartments. We say that this particular area of life is sacred while another area is secular. For example, we consider our daily jobs to be secular employment, probably because they do not have any immediate connection with the Church. On the other hand, our church activities we classify as sacred.

There is no warrant for this artificial segregation in our living. God never intended that some of our lives should be holy or sacred, while the rest of them should be unholy or secular. All that we are and all that we have belongs to Him! Every area of our living must come under His control.

We have a particularly good illustration of this in the way the Apostle Paul arranged the order of the subjects in his first epistle to the Corinthians. We all know that First Corinthians chapter fifteen is the great resurrection chapter. There, the exalted themes of Christ's resurrection and our own resurrection are dealt with in lofty fashion. It is as if we are thrust up to the very throne of God, so powerful and magnificent is Paul's handling of the subject.

And yet, without batting an eye, he switches themes. In First Corinthians 15:58, the last verse in the chapter, there are some beautiful words of encouragement based upon the truth of the resurrection. *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."* Then, in the very next verse (1 Corinthians 16:1) Paul goes on to say "now, concerning the offering, will the ushers please come forward to collect it!" Of course, these

are not the actual words, but the first verse of chapter sixteen does deal with the Christian's financial giving, and Paul could link such a mundane, practical matter with the exalted truth of the resurrection. In one breath, he could talk of the glories of the risen Christ and the importance of a good offering on the collection plate. To Paul, all things came under the heading of sacred.

So, our text talks about diverse things like hearing, speaking and anger. All must come under the scrutiny of our Lord. In the Christian life there is a time for all legitimate things. Do you recall what the writer of the book of Ecclesiastes said?

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: A time to be born, and a time to what die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace" (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8).

Sometimes, we tend to say that the writer of the book of Ecclesiastes was a died-in-the wool pessimist, a cynic, and perhaps he was. But his philosophy at this point was certainly very true and practical. So, as we turn to our text in James, we discover that "there is a time to hear and a time to speak and a time to be angry." Only, we are to *"be quick to hear; be slow to speak; be slow to anger!"* Now, just what is involved in these three admonitions? This is the subject of this chapter.

(1) BE QUICK TO HEAR

Obviously, this implies the readiness to listen to others; an attentiveness, an alertness to the speech of other people. Referring again to the writer of Ecclesiastes, we find some excellent advice in chapter five verse one: *"Guard your steps when you go to the house of God; to draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools"* (Ecclesiastes 5:1).

Probably one of the most difficult things most of us face is to be quiet and to listen. It always seems that we want to get into the act, and put in our own two cents. In fact, I suspect that many times we only hear half of what some

friend may be saying to us, because our minds are furiously active, thinking of what we are going to say when our friend gets through.

I recall reading of a minister of a former generation who was thrown into the company of a very talkative lady. For almost 45 minutes, she talked incessantly - small talk about herself, the weather, her friends and neighbors, a bit of gossip, etcetera. Finally, as she arose to leave, the minister said, "My dear lady, before you leave, permit me to give you one bit of advice. The next time you are in the company of others and when you have talked half an hour without intermission, I suggest you stop a while. It just might be that someone else in the group may have a few words to say."

Needless to say, this minister never read Emily Post, and would never win any prizes for tact. But, he points up a very important truth. All of us are too ready to do most of the talking, instead of being quick to hear and listen. Back in the sixth century B.C., a Greek philosopher, Pythagoras, always urged his disciples to spend five full years just listening rather than talking. He pointed out that, in this way, it is possible to learn a great deal, and thus be better equipped to supply answers for the world problems later on. This may be rather extreme advice, but it certainly offers food for thought.

A very close friend of mine was going through Fuller Theological Seminary. He sometimes told me that he got so weary of any preaching engagements. Just study, study, study! Frequently he argued that if only he had more opportunities to give forth some of the truth he takes in, he would not feel quite as much like a sponge, soaking up truth constantly. Whenever he gets into these moods, I remind him to "be quick to hear." His seminary training program was intended to offer him opportunity to listen, hear, soak up truth, formulate convictions. There will be plenty of time later on to make use of all of this truth in the field of service to which the Lord calls him.

After all, we must not forget that Moses spent more than 40 years preparing to be the Lord's servant. Each of us needs to learn this lesson: "Be quick to hear," not only from man, but above all, from God. For God says to us "*be still and know that I am God.*" Someone has pointed out, that the most important moments in our praying are the moments just before we start to talk to God and those moments just after we stop talking. For, it is infinitely more important that we hear what God has to say to us than that He hear what we have to say to Him.

(2) BE SLOW TO SPEAK

Along with the admonition to "be quick to hear" goes the second Order, "be slow to speak!" In this epistle, James has a great deal to say about the use of the tongue and speech. We shall notice more of this when we reach the third chapter in our study.

However, here in a general sense, he simply tells us to "*Be slow to speak!*" This does not refer to the speed with which we speak. There is no particular advantage of speaking a hundred words per minute rather than 140, or vice versa. Rather, we are cautioned to hesitate before speaking lest we say the wrong thing at the wrong time.

There is an old saying which reminds us that God gave man two ears but only one tongue. Thus we ought to hear twice as much as we speak. Besides, when we come right down to it, the person who is always most ready to speak, generally has the least to say. The writer of the book of Proverbs once said "*when words are many, transgression is not far away*" (Proverbs 10:19). Here was a writer who never saw the tons of paper used up on the long speeches of the United Nations delegates. He never listened to the bitter invective and name calling of political candidates in pre-election speeches. He, of course, never witnessed the knock-down, dragged out sessions of arbitration boards trying to settle labor-management disputes. And yet, he could write such words of wisdom under the inspiration of God: "*When words are many, transgression is not far away.*"

How easy it is, in our talks with others, to cause misunderstanding. Language is a wonderful medium for conveying our ideas. But the use of a wrong term or expression may so easily alienate friends. If only each of us would realize that, whatever words we speak to our fellow man, we also speak in the presence of God. Perhaps, then, our speech and motives would be different.

This is what the writer of Ecclesiastes had in mind when he said "*Be not rash with your speech, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word in the presence of God. God is in heaven; you are on earth. Therefore, let your words be few*" (Ecclesiastes 5:2). I suppose the Prophet Habakkuk had this same idea in mind when he lifted his eyes to the Judgment Throne of God and said "*the Lord is in his temple. Let all the earth be silent before him*" (Habakkuk 2:20). How we Christians need to "be slow to speak," and when we do speak let us say "*set a guard over my mouth, O Lord. Keep watch over the door of my lips*" (Psalm 141:3).

(3) SLOW TO ANGER

Finally, we are told in our text in James to "be slow to anger." At first glance it may appear as though there were no immediate connection between "anger" and "speaking" and "hearing." But there is far more relation than appears on the surface. Let me show you how.

The dictionary defines "anger" as "a strong emotion of displeasure and antagonism, caused by a sense of injury or insult." For example, suppose that on the subway, or bus during rush hour, when tempers are already hot, you accidentally step on someone's toe. Immediately they say, "Ouch! Why don't you watch out where you're stepping, you stupid creep!"

Now, according to our text, you are quick to hear this insulting remark. Right here, is the critical moment: How will you respond to the insulting outburst? You are angry! Intensely so! Smarting under the verbal injury to your pride. In this way, your being quick to hear is directly related to your anger.

Now, there are two things you can do. (1) Lash back at the person who called you "a stupid creep" and in a moment, there 's a free-for-all name-calling session. Or (2) you can recall the words of Proverbs 15:1, "*A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up more anger.*" If you decide to apologize to the angry person on whose toe you stepped, you are observing the principle of our text in James - "Quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger."

Never forget that we are constantly surrounded in life by all sorts of situations which can provoke anger. We can bypass most of them by following our text's suggestion. "But, someone may say, "Aren't we entitled to some "righteous indignation?" Yes, of course we are! But, let's be sure it isn't righteous indignation," and not a personal vendetta or seeking for revenge. All too often, this is what we call "righteous indignation" - getting even with someone who wronged us. Verse twenty offers a comment on this sort of anger, "*The anger of man does not work the righteousness of God.*" In such cases, let us bear in mind what St. Paul said to the Romans:

"Repay no one evil for evil. Never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written: 'Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19).

Incidentally, have you ever stopped to consider how wonderful it is that the Scriptures have an answer for just about every problem in life... by precept or principle.

One more thing, in spite of the biblical warnings against the wrong sort of anger, we as Christians still may get angry if necessary. In Ephesians 4:26, the Apostle Paul gives authority for anger. *"Be angry,"* he says, *"but do not sin! Do not let the sun go down on your anger."* Very simply put, this means that a Christian may show anger when the occasion demands. But, he may not let that angry spirit smolder or fester within him. In other words, he may not hold a grudge. When the day comes to an end, so must our anger. We must make things right with God and the person with whom we are angry. To let the anger linger on is to commit sin.

Thus, Paul's command in Ephesians 4:26, *"Go ahead and be angry, if you must: But, get it out of your system. Do not sin by letting the sun go down while you still retain your anger."* Above all, in our attitudes towards others, we must be forgiving. Our Lord gave the example Himself by forgiving even His enemies, when He had every right to be angry, and righteously indignant. Yet, He could say, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). This same sort of kindness must be ours. Paul put it in these words, *"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God, in Christ, forgave you"* (Eph. 4:32).

So, let us take our text to heart. "Be quick to hear," ready to listen to God and man, always alert to learn any new truth that will help us on our spiritual pilgrimage.

But, "be slow to speak," speaking only after careful deliberation and knowledge that you are speaking in God's presence. And, "be slow to anger," showing, instead of a hostile, bitter spirit, a holy spirit of loving forgiveness.

These are our Christian obligations.

CHAPTER SIX
MIRROR, MIRROR, ON THE WALL
James 1:22-27

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing.

²⁶ If any one thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this man's religion is vain. ²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. (James 1:22-27).

In our last study, we saw the importance of being willing to listen, and a corresponding importance of being willing to hesitate before speaking, lest we say the wrong thing at the wrong time.

However, I am sure that right after James wrote these words of counsel (vv. 19-20), the Holy Spirit brought to his remembrance a very real danger. For, let 's face it, we all have a tendency to exaggerate and overemphasize what we are told. What is intended to be a position of moderation, we push to extremes. This is true from our youth onward; we never seem to outgrow the tendency.

For example, a small child is told that he can have some candy - but not too much. So, before long, the whole box of candy is gone. A teenage girl is told by her parents that she may have one or two dates a week, provided that this does not interfere with her school work. Yet, before long, she is trying to go out on dates every night in the week.

An adult is told by his doctor that he must not drink so much coffee; it's bad for his stomach. So, because he is frightened of ulcers or cancer, he stops all coffee drinking, even though he loves it.

You see, in each case, a position of moderation or temperance is encouraged, but humans have a tendency to push moderation into one extreme or the other. So it is with our text. James had just urged Christians to "*be quick to*

hear, slow to speak" (v. 19). He knew that some of the readers of these words were going to get the entirely wrong impression from what he said. They would come to the conclusion that *"to be slow to speak,"* means that they are not to say anything at all concerning their faith in Christ. So, they would conclude, *"we will just be silent witnesses."* Of course, it's only a step from this position to not doing anything at all for Jesus Christ. Therein lies the danger of becoming just a hearer - not a doer. It was to offset and counteract this trend that James wrote the words of the text (James 1:22-25).

22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing.

Once again, we are face to face with a very practical, down-to-earth issue. For we all realize how widespread is the problem James has touched upon here. Almost every church has a great many members who are *"hearers only"* and not doers. If you think this is not so, just stop for a moment and consider your church!

One Of the few churches I know which manages to get around this problem of inactive members is the Church of the Savior in Washington D.C. This church is an interdenominational, inter-racial group which meets in an old brownstone house on Massachusetts Avenue in the nation's capitol. The pastor, Rev. Newton Gordon Cosby, is a most unusual man. Several years ago, I talked with him in his study and he outlined his plan and program to me.

Mr. Cosby is disgusted with large churches where members are Lost in the crowd and never get to apply the Christian principles they learn from the pulpit. So, he keeps his church small - no more than about 60 members. But, all these members are active, working, studying members or they do not stay on the rolls long. They are required to attend Bible study sessions. They are expected to serve in some definite capacity as part of their church covenant. At the close of every year, the service and living of each member is scrutinized. If the member has not lived up to the membership standards, they find themselves looking for a new church home. And, as soon as the church goes over its 60 member limit, it breaks off and begins a new branch church elsewhere in the vicinity.

How refreshing it is to come upon such a church in which members are required to be more than just *"hearers only."* I rather think James would have run his congregation in this way, had he been pastor of a local congregation.

Observe the statement James has made in verse 22, *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves"*. He suggests that those whose whole Christian life consists in "hearing" without "doing" are really "deceiving themselves. That is, if we can Listen to the truth of God expounded, and fail to apply it to our lives, we are deceiving ourselves by thinking that we are successful Christians. Indeed, although James does not say it here in so many words as he will later do so in chapter two, it is questionable whether a person is a Christian at all if he is a "hearer" and not a "doer." The two must go hand in hand. For, as we shall see, *"faith without works is dead"*. Hearing, without putting into practice, also is lifeless. You are only *"deceiving yourself."*

Incidentally, the word "deceiving" (v. 22) is a most descriptive one. It means to "pull off onto a siding" as a railroad train does on occasion. Several years ago, I took a night sleeping car to Ohio for a week of meetings. Several times during the night, I was awakened by the train jolting to a stop. Then, with a rush of wind, a fast train would clatter by on the other track. Next morning, I asked the conductor about this, He told me that, since there was only a single track part of the way, every now and then our train had to pull off on a side track to allow a passenger or a freight train to pass by in the other direction, This is exactly what the Greek word for "deceive" means - to pull off onto a siding in your thoughts - to think incorrectly, instead of remaining on the clear track of logical, sensible thought.

When a person who is a Christian (in name, at least) refuses to put their knowledge and faith to work, they are not thinking logically. They have gotten off onto a siding of deception, and needs to switch themself back onto the main line of Christian living. It is at this point that James uses a most interesting illustration. *"For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like."* (James 1:23-24). There are four words in these two verses which we must look at closely: (1) observes; (2) natural face; (3) goes away; (11-) forgets.

(1) Observes

"If anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face." The word for "observes means to carefully regard, to scrutinize closely." This would be something like a conceited person would

do, standing before the mirror and admiring himself by saying, "My! Aren't you the handsome one!" Or, like a vain person might do when worrying about a new wrinkle or a gray hair that wasn't there last week. Thus, the word means to look at intently; to study closely.

(2) Natural Face

But, notice that the text is talking about someone who is closely examining his natural face. That is, his outward appearance; the face he carries around with him, not the one covered up with oils, creams, lotions, powders and rouges. In other words, our text is talking about someone, a man or woman, who faces that awful moment of truth when they actually see their outer appearance as they would not want anyone else to see them. This is the "natural face" devoid of all deceptive cover-ups.

(3) Goes Away

The third word in verse 24 says that, after viewing his "natural face" in the mirror, "*he goes his way.*" Indeed! Who wouldn't go away after such a frightful sight! He goes away and "*straightway forgets what he was like.*" After the first cup of coffee and breakfast, or for "The ladies," a session at the make up table, it is easy to forget what your natural face looked like.

Of course, there is a deeper significance to our text that merely this. For James is also talking about the "natural man" -what man actually is in the sight of God---a sinner lost and undone.

First Corinthians 2:14 tells us "the natural man receives not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, since they must be spiritually discerned."

If a man is only a hearer of the Word and does not become a doer, he has seen himself a sinner. He has contemplated and scrutinized his lost condition before God, But then, without putting his trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, he "*goes away*" and "*forgets what he saw.*" The Greek text makes this even stronger: "He goes his way and continues to stay away." This is a clear indication that such a person has never been born again.

How many, many people are like that! They are confronted by a true picture of their natural state as the mirror of God 's Word faithfully portrays the reflection. But, they "go away" from that reflection and quickly forget what they saw in the Word.

The writer of the book of Hebrews has a comment on this attitude, "Therefore, we must pay the closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift from it... How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" (Hebrews 2:1-3).

"He who looks intently into the perfect law of liberty, and continues so to do, will be blessed in his doing, since he will be not only a hearer, but a doer" (James 1:25).

However, at verse 25 of our text in James, the whole picture shifts. "But, he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing" (Jas. 1:25). Here, two things are startlingly different. First, the viewer looks more intently into the mirror. Second, his look into the mirror of God's Word is permanent and continuing.

The Greek word for "looks in verse 25 is different from the word "observes" in verse 24. Here, it means "to study from various angles."

For example, when a man shaves in front of a mirror, he can cut the most ridiculous faces. He twists and turns his head, studying his face in the mirror, to make sure he's gotten off all the whiskers. Or, when a lady is fixing her hairdo, she turns her head this way and that way, studying intently or spraying with some hair-fixing solution. This is what the word "looks" means - to study closely and intently from every conceivable angle.

This is the manner in which we Christians are to study intently the perfect Word of God. And not only that, we are to "continue therein" or "persevere." In other words, we are to make the study of the Word of God a constant practice. Not just a one-time, careful survey followed by a "going our own way and "forgetting?" what we saw. In this way (v. 25 says) we will find ourselves willing not only to hear the Word, but to put into practice in our lives what it requires.

Lastly, let us give our attention to verses 26 and 27:

"If anyone thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this man's religion is vain. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep one's self unstained from the world." (James 1:26-27).

In this concluding section of chapter one, James touches on religion." Many of us have tended to steer away from the term religion, probably because it has so often been used to describe the dead formalism of a decedent form of churchianity, instead of vital Christianity. Thus, we have often tended to call Christianity a life rather than a religion.

But, as James uses the term here, he means the outward evidence of our faith. Never forget that "man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). God does not need "proof" or demonstration of your faith; He knows the heart. But, our neighbors, fellow Christians, friends, associates, all need some evidence of our faith in Christ. Our mere profession is not enough for them. This "proof" or "evidence" is our religion, or our religious activity.

Now, James says, *"if anyone thinks that he is religious and does not bridle his tongue, this man's religion is empty. . ."* Here again is the combining of the spiritual with the practical, showing that the two go hand in hand and are not divisible. If you claim to have Christian faith and it does not operate in so commonplace an area as your language or speech, your faith does not really amount to very much.

Throughout this entire epistle, this one theme will continue to recur: faith and works must go together. If they do not, something is wrong with the faith; there is a short circuit. Such religion, if it does not come to grips with every area of life is void, empty, vain, powerless.

What, then, is true religion? That is, if we were asked for an example of what true Christianity would incorporate, what could we say? From time to time, in the question and answer periods, that I conduct in my various Bible classes and Bible teaching missions, a question is received which asks "what is a true Christian?" The answer I give is generally very much the same, and it almost parallels precisely what James has set forth in our text. A true Christian is a person who professes faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and who then proceeds to demonstrate that faith by a religious life, i.e., a life of good works. Let us not forget the two-fold picture found in Ephesians 2:8-10. Frequently we have a tendency to quote only the eighth and ninth verses in regard to salvation, but the tenth verse is equally important:

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not because of works, lest any man should boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for [the purpose of] good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

At random, as the Holy Spirit led him, James singled out two phases of life which demonstrate Christianity. (1) Visiting orphans and widows in their need; (2) keeping unstained by the world.

Now, some have said that James was too general in his definition of religion, After all, they point out, he did not say anything about prayer, Bible study, going to church or worshipping God. Of course not! These are all the phases of the Christian life which concern our relationship to God. James assumes this is already true of us. He is concerned with our relationship to our fellow human beings on the practical plane of everyday Christian living.

So, he singles out benevolent works like ministering to needy people. Incidentally, "to visit," as used in the text means more than to pay a social call. It is a word which is used to describe God visiting His people with deliverance. Thus, "to intervene" with help and aid would more adequately describe the Greek word than "to visit."

Remember, we are not only to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind, but also to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Finally, the Christian must "keep himself unstained from the world. This does not mean that we are to avoid the world, to withdraw from it, to hate it, to have no interest in the world at all. If our Lord had had such an attitude, where would we be today? No indeed! We are to live in the midst of the world. We are to work with it's people, associate with them, live among them, converse with them, be cordial and friendly to them. But, always, although we live in the world with its people. We are joined to Jesus Christ and cannot be stained by our contact with the world any more than He was. This can only be when our religion is pure and undefiled before God as the text states; when that mind is in us which was in also in Christ Jesus.

Does the reader think that he is religious? If so, let him be a doer of God's Word and will... and not only a hearer.

CHAPTER SEVEN THE SIN OF PARTIALITY

James 2:1-8

1 My brethren, show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. 2 For if a man with gold rings and in fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, 3 and you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "Have a seat here, please," while you say to the poor man, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my beloved brethren. Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you, is it not they who drag you into court? 7 Is it not they who blaspheme the honorable name which was invoked over you?

8 If you really fulfil the royal law, according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well. (James 2:1-8).

In this chapter we want to discuss one of the cardinal sins of most evangelical churches, the sin of partiality or favoritism. Let us never forget that not all church sin is doctrinal in nature. A church can be ninety-nine and forty-four one hundredths per cent pure in doctrine and yet reek to high heaven with the heresy of improper attitudes towards its members. This is something we Christians frequently forget. We assume that, because a church and its members can sign a sound doctrinal statement, it must be a good Christian church. But this is not necessarily so.

There are some churches which are as orthodox as St. Paul in doctrine, and yet have the spirit of Judas Iscariot hovering over their every action toward one another. Sometimes, the problem lies at the doorstep of the minister and the official board; sometimes, the congregational members themselves are guilty. But, partiality or favoritism is one of the great stumbling blocks in Christendom. For example, I know of a large evangelical church in a metropolitan area which faced this very problem not too long ago. Its former pastor was flagrantly guilty of the sin of partiality. On Sunday mornings, following the morning worship service, he would be greeting people at the door and some nondescript member of the church would ask a serious question that disturbed him. The pastor would start to answer the question

when suddenly he would spot a wealthy, prominent member of his congregation slipping out the door, unnoticed, I am told on good authority that the pastor would immediately drop his conversation with the needy person and run fawning after the wealthy man. This attitude, I understand, figured largely in his leaving the church.

I know of another strongly fundamental church which resented the fact that new members would attempt to infiltrate the long-standing cliques in the congregation. The new members would come to the pastor and complain of the attitude of the long-time pillars of the church. The newcomers were looked upon as outsiders who just did not belong to "our group." In fact, it was like chipping away at, a glacier to try to win acceptance. The new members were not necessarily disagreeable, nor were they "persecution complex" people who scream "favoritism" or "prejudice" at the drop of a hat. They were simply victims of the longstanding narrowness of small-minded Christians.

This is the sort of thing against which our text speaks out in no uncertain terms. Let no one think that these matters we talk about in these chapters are unimportant because they are not directly related to doctrine.

Several years ago, I spoke in a large church in an eastern city and my subject was Romans 13, and "The Christian's Relationship to the Government." In the course of the study, I stated that the Christian should support the principle of capital punishment since it is biblical. The Christian should be willing to serve in the Armed Forces - if the government requires it, since he (the Christian) is to be subject to the powers that be. The Christian should pay his taxes regularly, since this is Scriptural.

After the service, a man came up to me at the door with fire in his eyes, "Why don't you preachers stick to preaching the Gospel? he asked. By that, he meant, why don't I content myself with telling people every week that Christ died for our sins, that you must be born again, that heaven is a prepared place for prepared people, that you must be in the world but not of it. This sort of thing is all some people mean by "the Gospel." The preacher that dares to speak on other themes that are equally biblical and just as much a part of "the Gospel," is quickly taken to task for deviating from traditional patterns.

We must never forget that the Gospel is far more inclusive than just these few basic truths. The Gospel covers every area of our lives, our doctrine as well as our practice. So, when James speaks of the sin of partiality, he is "preaching the Gospel." When the Apostle Paul talks about the Christian's

obligation to the government, he is preaching the Gospel. When the Apostle Peter discusses the manner in which Christian wives ought to influence their unsaved husbands, he is "preaching the Gospel." With this in mind, we now begin our study of partiality as discussed by James in this epistle.

1. The Principle of Partiality Stated

In James 2:1, we read, *"My brethren, show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory."* If you were to look up the word "partiality" in the dictionary, you would find that it means, "the act of favoring one person or thing more than another." The Greek word which James used for "partiality" is a most interesting one. It suggests the selection of the person on the basis of outward appearance.

For example, in a beauty contest, a girl or woman is selected to win the prize on the basis of looks, appearance, not character or intelligence essentially. As a matter of fact, in many beauty contests, a prostitute might well win first prize if she happens to appeal to the judges.

This is the word James has used to describe "partiality" - the selection of one person above others on the basis of outward appearance or surface circumstances alone. And our text makes crystal clear the fact that such decision by appearance alone can have no place in the Christian's life. This sort of thing is absolutely incompatible with our faith in Jesus Christ. *"My brethren, show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

We who know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Redeemer, have no right to judge a person on the basis of dress, facial features, education, race, stature, wealth, poverty, skin color, denomination or other relatively minor factor. What really counts is the fact that he is our brother in Christ, if he knows the Lord Jesus Christ. Or, he is a potential brother for whom Christ died, and it is our business to seek to win him to the Lord.

Never forget, God did not consider our appearance, wealth, poverty, good looks or education when He determined to send Christ to die for us. In this connection, it might do us well to review a passage of Scripture from the book of Deuteronomy in which God sweeps away in one stroke any thought of earning His favor by something that may be in us inherently.

"For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his Love upon you and chose you, for you were the

fewest of all peoples; but it is because the Lord loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage” (Deuteronomy 7:6-8).

These words, spoken to the nation of Israel, removed from their thinking any idea that God chose them on the basis of some good or outstanding characteristic in them. His choice was made on the basis of His grace and His love. The hymn writer has phrased something of the same thing in these words:

"He saw me ruined in the fall,
And loved me, not withstanding all;
He saved me from my lost estate;
His loving kindness, Oh! How Great!"¹

One other thing worthy of note. Observe the designation of our Lord in verse one (James 2:1) "our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory." If you read this in the King James Version, you will note that the words "the Lord" are set in italic type. This means that the words set in this slanted type are not in the Greek text, but have been supplied by the translators. Actually, this text says, "our Lord Jesus Christ, the glory."

The New Testament gives our Lord Jesus a number of titles. He is called "the Way," "the Resurrection," the Vine," "the Good Shepherd," "the Truth," "the Truth," etc. Here, James calls his half brother, "the Glory."

Now, to those who are not Jews, this designation probably does not mean very much, But, the word "glory" would immediately bring to the Jewish mind the glory of Jehovah which hovered over the tabernacle in the wilderness, and came to fill the temple of Solomon. The Hebrews called this this glory, "he Shekinah Glory." The word shekinah comes from the Hebrew root *shakan*, which means "to dwell." Thus, the shekinah glory was the glory of God which came to dwell with His people.

Our text flatly declares that our Lord Jesus Christ was, and is, "the Glory of God." James has said here the same thing that the write of the book of Hebrews pointed out as he sought to describe Christ:

"He is the brightness of God's glory, the express image of his person" (Heb, 1:3).

¹ "Awake My Soul to Joyful Lays," William Caldwell, (1831)

How wonderful it for James to know that his own half brother, whom he had known in the flesh, was "Glory of God". And, how marvelous it is for us to realize that Christ, the Glory of God, loved us sufficiently to die for us.

Indeed, when we consider Jesus Christ our Lord of glory, how can we possibly show partiality to others among us? In the presence of Christ, the Glory of God, all our petty distinctions as to wealth, poverty, denomination, race, etc. must vanish.

For example. In a moderately lighted room, it is very easy to make distinctions. You might look about you and say "I like his tie; I don't like her hat, etc. But, if suddenly a huge brilliant spotlight were to shine in your eyes, you could no longer see to make distinctions, or to voice your likes and dislikes. You would then only be conscious of the brilliance of the light and its blinding quality. Or consider a group of people going in to the New York Museum of Art on Fifth Avenue, to view a special exhibit of some great master. As the spectators ascend the steps, they look quite different. One may be shabbily dressed, poor, perhaps even unkempt. Another, walking beside him, may be engulfed in mink, wealthy, knowing nothing of need. There may even be some remarks such as, "What is that unkempt dirty person going into our museum for?"

But, once inside, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, stand before the great paintings of the master artist. In the breathless, awe-inspiring atmosphere created by these paintings, all class distinctions vanish instantly.

So, James tells us that when we Christian church members stand in the presence of Christ, the Glory, daily, there can be no partiality shown to others. This is un-Christian. For, when we stand in His presence, and we should do this constantly, we only see Him. Our view of others, therefore, is colored by our view of Christ.

2. The Principle of Partiality, Illustrated

So that there could be no doubt as to what James was discussing, he illustrated his principle of partiality in verses two to four, by the story of the wealthy man with gold rings and fine clothing and the poor man in shabby clothing, both coming into the church sanctuary. The scene posed by the text could very well take place in most of our churches.

2 For if a man with gold rings and in fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, 3 and you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "Have a seat here, please," while you say to the poor

man, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? (James 2:2-4).

Apparently, these two men were strangers, stopping in the church for the first time. It might happen anywhere. Let us take the First Baptist Church of Podunk Center. But it might just as easily be the Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Episcopalian, or your church! It is five minutes to eleven and the church is just about filled. There are two seats left, one near the front in a very prominent place, and the other way back under the balcony behind a post.

Suddenly, the ushers look and a Cadillac drives up to the church door, a wealthy-looking man gets out and starts up the stairs to the church. At the same moment, a seedy-looking man starts up the church steps. He looks unkempt, could well use a bar of Lifebuoy or Dial soap, and needs a shave. Now, the question is: Which man will get the prominent seat up front, and who will be led by the ushers to sit under the balcony behind the post. Three guesses, and the first two don't count!

Yet, the ushers who determine to hide the tramp and usher the big shot up front are showing partiality, whether they realize it or not. They are taking upon themselves the right to decide who is better than whom. And their judgment is based solely on outward appearances... since they do not know either man. Actually, the seedy hobo may really be a millionaire with a fortune sewed up in his mattress at home. The rich man on the other hand, may not have a penny to his name, and may have borrowed or stolen the Cadillac.

So, James rightly berates Christian people for jumping to conclusions: *"Have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with unworthy motives? (v. 4).* And I ask you, my reader, do we not all do this sort of thing far too frequently? Therefore, the next time you find yourself exhibiting partiality over some issue, remember this text.

3. The Principle of Partiality, Elaborated

In verses five through eight, James has elaborated upon his theme.

5 Listen, my beloved brethren. Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you, is it not they who drag you into court? 7 Is it not they who blaspheme the honorable name which was invoked over you?

8 If you really fulfil the royal law, according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well (James 2:5-8).

A casual glance at this text can be most unfortunate. For it might seem to say that God is only interested in the poor, that He has no concern for the rich. Certainly, this is a false, misleading impression. For God does not show partiality. The Bible says *"the same Lord is rich unto all who call upon him"* (Romans 10: 12). We are also told that *"not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called"* (I Cor. 1:26). But notice, although God does not call many of those who are rich in this world's goods, this does not mean that He does not call any. The Scriptures do not condemn or censure the wealthy person; even the wealthy Christian necessarily out of the will of God because of his wealth. For, it is not money per se, but the love of money which is the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10).

What our text is saying, is that God has chosen those who are poor with reference to the world, to be rich in faith and heirs of His kingdom. This is the way the fifth verse should be translated:

"Has not God chosen those who are poor with reference to this world to become rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him?"

You see, to be poor with reference to the world, does not mean that a person need be a pauper. A very wealthy man who really knows the Lord may be poor with reference to this world, if he is trusting in the Lord instead of his wealth; if he loves the Lord far beyond his earthly possessions. In this way, he is poor with reference to this world's wealth, yet rich in his faith toward God. Consequently, he is an heir of God's kingdom which has been promised to those who love Him, whether they be rich or poor in worldly wealth.

So, whatever your station in life, however much or little you may have of worldly things in God's providence, you can say what the psalmist did:

"There are some who trust in chariots, and some in horses: but, we will trust in the name of the Lord" (Psalm 20:7).

Summing up:

James referred to that great text in Leviticus 19:18 which our Lord Jesus Christ also quoted to the legal specialists who tried to trap Him on one occasion: *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself"* (v .8).

Here is a divine pattern to be followed in connection with our attitude toward our fellow man, and in particular, our attitude toward our brothers and sisters in Christ:

"If you love them as your self, you do well. But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors" (vv. 8,9).

Oh! What a need there is for the Lord's people to escape from the narrow confinement of a small circle of friends, with its tendency to look down on those not in our circle as undesirables who are not welcome in our company. There can be no place for this attitude in Christian thinking and living.

Instead, let us go out of our way to offer a friendly word of encouragement, so that others who may long for some real Christian fellowship may know that Christ and Christ's people are interested in them.

CHAPTER EIGHT THE TWO WAYS OF SALVATION

James 2:10

10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.

Probably most people who read these words have long been accustomed to the view that salvation is to be found only at the hand of the God of the Bible. From early childhood in Sunday school, or at least from the time of our conversion, we have realized that God is the author of our salvation. Correspondingly, we have come to believe that all other gods are false, and that religions which worship other gods are misleading and untrue.

Indeed, in Psalm 96:5 we find a verse that in the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) says: "All of the gods of the heathen are demons." That may be pretty strong language, but it states categorically the position we Christians have been taught in Scripture. There is but one God, and He alone has the way of salvation for mankind.

For those of us who accept the biblical record as inspired of God, there cannot be the slightest doubt that God alone is man's Savior. Listen to these claims from His lips:

"I am the Lord, and beside me there is no Savior" (Isaiah 43:11).

"I am the Lord your God... you know no god but Me, and beside Me there is no savior" (Hosea 13:4).

"For God alone my soul waits in silence... He only is... my salvation" (Psalm 62:5-6).

"Truly, in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the... mountains; truly in the Lord our God is the salvation [of His people]" (Jeremiah 3:23).

Clearly, God alone is man's Savior or Deliverer.

Besides this, however, the Bible tells us that in order to come before God and receive His salvation, we must come through Jesus Christ His Son. Recall Jesus own words in John 14:6 *"I am the way and the truth and the life: no one comes to the Father except through me."*

In addition, the Apostle Peter also said, *"There is no salvation in anyone else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12).

How true this is: God alone is Savior. But in order to approach Him, it is necessary to come through Jesus Christ. Why is this so? Why cannot man go directly to God? Let us be very careful not to make a serious mistake here.

For, it is not that God must have a private secretary between Himself and us, like a big business executive who must keep unwanted callers from disturbing him. Nor is it that we need Jesus Christ as the "soft-hearted" Redeemer who must try to pacify a "hard-hearted God," like a man who uses a politician's influence to get him out of some trouble with the law.

This is not the purpose for Christ's position as Mediator between God and man. Rather, we must understand that the very holiness of God will permit only perfect beings to fellowship with Him directly. If a person cannot offer God a life of complete perfection, he simply will not be accepted by God. Actually, of course, this same principle is in operation constantly in our lives.

For example, here is a personnel director in a large office, charged with the responsibility of employing a new stenographer for one of the executives. He knows that this executive dictates rapidly, approximately 150 to 180 (or more) words a minute. Therefore, he sets the standard for all applicants for the job. They must be able to take dictation at the required speed, or they cannot even be considered. It's as simple as that.

Well, in the same way, God sets the standard for all who come to Him as applicants for salvation and heaven. He asks one simple question, "Are you perfect and can you furnish the quality of absolute perfection?" If the answer is "No," the applicant is rejected at once, since God only accepts perfect people into His fellowship and presence.

But, and this is an important "but," here is the purpose for which Jesus Christ stands as Mediator between God and man. He offers His own perfection as a substitute for that which we do not have. By His work on Calvary's cross, Christ atoned for our sins. The Apostle Peter put it this way, "He himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness (1 Peter 2:20), or as St. Paul put it, "For our sake God made Christ to be sin, He who knew no sin, so that in Him, we might become the righteousness of God" (11 Core 5:21).

You see, Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sin, paying completely for us the penalty for sin which we should have borne. Literally, He was made

sin on our behalf, as we shall see, And He did more than merely take away our sin - great though that was. He furnished something to replace the sin - perfect righteousness. You see, the whole scientific principle that nature abhors a vacuum holds true in spiritual matters as well.

Do you recall the story Jesus told about the demon which was cast out of a man? It is found recorded in Matthew 12:43-45.

"When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest, but he finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came' and when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and brings with him seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first."

Here is a picture of a person who succeeds in getting rid of his sin, whatever it might be. However, he fails to replace that sin with something worthwhile. It may be the person who "turns over a new leaf" at New Years. Or the devout person who "gives something up for Lent," or in some other way tries a "do-it-yourself" method of getting rid of sin.

Unless the void or vacuum left by the forsaken sin is filled up with something worthwhile and good to replace it, the old evil will come back to reclaim its throne with additional force. This is why, when our Lord Jesus Christ cleanses a person from sin, He also fills the gaping void with righteousness; "We become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). In God's sight, we become just as perfect as His Son, since we are accepted by God in the person of His Son.

Now, from what we have seen so far, it's clear that there are two ways of coming to God and attaining eternal life in His presence. (1) It is possible to come to Him, offering Him our personal perfection - a perfect life - if we have this to offer. (2) Or (lacking perfection - as all of us do - we must come to God offering the righteousness of Jesus Christ our substitute.

One or the other of these two avenues of approach to God must be taken by anyone who desires His fellowship. Actually of course, no one has ever come to God apart from Christ. That is, since no one is perfect in himself, for all practical purposes, there is only one real way of access to God, and that is through Jesus Christ, But, because so many people constantly talk about their good works, and assume that these works in some way will influence God to smile with favor upon them, the Bible does offer such persons an

alternate route to God's presence, if they can meet the requirements. Therefore, consider the words of Galatians 3:10 for a moment. *"For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them.'"*

The Galatians, many of them at least, were of the opinion that their good works would help to save them. In fact, they appeared to be putting quite a strong emphasis on what they were doing to be saved. Therefore, St. Paul felt that the time had come to set the record straight once and for all in language so clear that it could not be misunderstood. Perhaps, if I may paraphrase Galatians 3:10, this will become crystal clear. For, Paul said something like this : "If you Galatians are going to trust in your good works to bring you to God - all right! Only, remember that this brings you under a definite curse written in the Old Testament. For, if you are going to trust in the law, you must keep the law - every last item of it - nothing excepted!

The curse under which you bring yourself says, *"Cursed is everyone who does not continue to practice all things which are in the law!"*

So, if a person today decides to find his way to God by good works, this is perfectly acceptable to God, provided the person lives an absolutely perfect life from the cradle to the grave. They must never commit a single sin; they must never break even one of the ten commandments all the way through their life.

If he can do this, he will be accepted - yes, welcomed! into God's presence as a perfect person. But, if such a person commits even a single sin, or breaks as much as one single commandment, they immediately come under this ancient curse found in Deuteronomy 27:26, *"Cursed is he who fails to practice all that is written into this law of works."*

This is exactly what our text in James says also. *"For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point, has become guilty of all of it"* (James 2:10). You see, if a person is trying to find God's salvation by good works, they dare not make a single slip. For, even the tiniest sin nullifies the whole program.

This is so different from the way we usually think. Most of us, realizing our own sinfulness, tend to overlook and excuse small mistakes and sins in others. We speak of these errors as "little white lies" or "some small thing - not worth quoting." But, God is perfect, and He demands that those who want to approach Him through the means of good works must be without the

slightest sin. For even one sin, however small, is sufficient to condemn a person from God's presence forever.

Once again, this principle is universally true. A row boat may have only one small hole in it, but that one small hole is sufficient to sink the boat. A deep-sea diver depends on the air supply sent down to him through the air hose. Now, that air hose may have only a tiny crack in it. But that tiny crack will fill the diver helmet with water instead of air and he will drown.

So it is in connection with everything where perfection is required. Even the slightest imperfection renders the whole thing useless. And when man tells God that he is going to live a good life, God says: "Fine: But if you want to gain entrance to my heaven by that means, you must be perfect, from birth to death. One imperfection will nullify the whole plan. *"He who keeps the law and fails at one point is just as guilty as if he had broken the whole law."*

Remember too, this keeping of the law involves more than the outward formalities of good living. For, while *"man looks on the outward appearance, God looks on the heart"* (I Samuel 16:7). A man might hesitate to take up some lethal weapon to kill his fellow. After all, that would be murder and the commandment says *"thou shalt not commit murder."* Yet, Jesus once said, *"I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother is also liable to the judgment"* (Matthew 5:21, 22). You see, the seeds of hatred are just as sinful in God's sight as the open act of murder.

Similarly, a man might think twice about committing adultery. After all, the commandment states *"thou shalt not commit adultery"* Still, Jesus pointed out that God searches the heart, and *"everyone who even looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* (Matthew 5:27).

Since God sees the heart of man, He knows when man breaks the divine law, inwardly or openly. And, whoever keeps the whole law, yet fails in one point, is guilty of the whole law. How futile it is for anyone to even think that he can approach God in their own strength - by his own works. It simply cannot be done. The writer of Ecclesiastes tells us why: *"Surely, there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins"* (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

Well, now, if it is impossible for anyone to come to God on the basis and merits of human works, and we have fairly well demonstrated that this is so, this leaves us with only one alternative. Man must acknowledge that Christ alone furnishes the way of access to God.

God knew, from all eternity, that man the sinner would be unable to keep the whole law of God. He knew that man would consequently fall under the curse mentioned in Galatians 3:10: *"Cursed is he who does not continue to practice all things which are written in the law."* So, God provided His own Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who became a curse for us, took the curse we should have borne, upon Himself. In Galatians 3:13 we read, *"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us... for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree."*

Did you ever stop to ask yourself how the perfect Son of God could have died? Keep in mind that death was God's penalty for sin. Prior to the committing of the first sin by Adam, there had been no death, But since Adam, every human being has faced physical death as the judgment of God on the human race. Only one or two escaped death and that only by divine intervention. However, how could Jesus Christ be put to death since He was the author of life and, indeed, was life itself? He had no sin. Thus, death had no claim upon Him. Even though He was bearing our sins in His body, they were not His sins, and thus death had no claim upon Him, How, then, could He be subject to death?

The answer is found in Galatians 3:13, the last part: "Christ was made a curse on our behalf, as it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.'" Christ had no sin to condemn Him to death. Had He willfully committed any sins, He could never have been man's Redeemer. But, by an action not His own, His enemies caused Him to break the law. Those who condemned Christ to death, sentenced Him to be crucified, to be hanged on a cross. If Jesus Christ had been condemned to any other type of death, He could not have died. Death would have had no claim upon Him. It was this type of death alone which could enable Christ to die under a curse.

A little verse in Deuteronomy 21:23 said "A hanged man is cursed by God." So, when those Roman soldiers drove the nails into Christ's palms and fastened Him there to the tree, they were making it possible for Him to die - not through the suffering thus inflicted; not by the loss of blood.

But the hanging on the tree brought the curse of God on Jesus Christ, as clearly stated in the Deuteronomy text, "A hanged man is cursed by God" (Deut. 21:23). Thus, without lifting a finger, Christ became a curse for us, and died for our sins.

How marvelous are the ways of God! God made Christ to be sin for us. Think of it. The sinless Son of God became sin for us, so that we might have the

perfection and righteousness of God available to us. How right St. Paul was when he said,

*"Oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding
out" (Romans 11:33).*

CHAPTER NINE THE RELATION OF FAITH AND WORKS

James 2:14-26

14 What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? 17 So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

18 But some one will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. 20 Do you want to be shown, you shallow man, that faith apart from works is barren? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works, 23 and the scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness"; and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 And in the same way was not also Rahab the harlot justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? 26 For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead.

We come now to a consideration of this knotty question of faith and works. I suppose that, among the many and varied problems which have plagued the Church through the years, the issue of the relationship between faith and works has been high on the list. The fact that James, in this epistle, comes out so strongly on the side of the necessity of good works has disturbed many believers.

Our Roman Catholic friends make ample use of this second chapter of James to uphold their doctrine of works. Because of this, Martin Luther had a contempt for the epistle of James; he called it an epistle of straw. However, as we shall see, James does not say that you need good works to become a Christian. The whole Bible militates against such an idea. But he does say that the faith we have in Jesus Christ must produce good works, or it becomes clear that such faith is dead.

For example, suppose I purchase a new electric toaster. I get up one morning with my mouth watering for a nice piece of toast and a cup of coffee and a glass of milk. I plug in the new toaster, put in the bread and flip the switch. Nothing happens I run through the same procedure again, flip the switch back and forth several times and hammer on the toaster. But, no use! There is no heat to toast the bread.

Now, either the power supply is turned off, the toaster doesn't work, or there is a short circuit in the wire to the toaster. I discover that the power is on, and I assume the toaster is all right since it is new and worked in the store before I purchased it. Therefore, the trouble now lies in the electric outlet or cord.

Translating this into the realm of spiritual things, we can say that there is nothing wrong with our "power supply" (God). He is the same yesterday, today and always. The Lord Jesus Christ said *"all power is given to me in heaven and earth"* (Matthew 28:18). But, if we say we believe in God through Jesus Christ, and God's power does not flow through us to produce good works, there is a short circuit in our faith somewhere. And it would do us good to try to locate the difficulty and have it repaired and corrected.

The biblical principle is clearly set forth in Ephesians 2:8-10:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God - not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for the purpose of good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

You see, it is simply not enough for a Christian to say, "I believe." For God responds by saying, "If you believe, why doesn't your belief demonstrate itself? So, I think that it is extremely practical for James to deal at such length with this matter of the relationship of faith and works. It would do the reader a lot of good to stop right now and read over the text – James 2:14-26.

First of all, notice that James introduces his theme by stating his proposition in the form of a question (v. 1:14) *"What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him?"*

Probably the last part of verse is enough to make a good evangelical Christian's hair stand on end. For James seems perilously close to teaching the doctrine of salvation by works. Notice his question: "Can faith save him?"

Now, probably many of us would shout out, "Of course, faith saves a person - faith plus nothing." But, wait a moment: What kind of faith saves a person? Does a person become a Christian merely by saying, "I believe in Jesus?" Something like you might say, "I believe in the mayor of my city," or, believe in the city's transportation system?"

Belief in Christ means more than acknowledging that He once lived on earth almost two thousand years ago. Belief in Christ involves the flow of His divine life through us. We become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4) and once a person becomes a true child of God, he should be able to say with the Apostle Paul, *"It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me"* (Galatians 2:20). Jesus once said, *"I am the vine; you are the branches . He who abides in me and i in him will bear much fruit. For apart from me , you can do nothing"* (John 15:5).

Just as the very life of the vine flows through the branches to produce fruit, so, if a person is truly united to Christ, they will have the divine life flowing through them to produce fruit in good works. If there are no good works, no fruit. Can it really be said that the faith that person claims to have is genuine? Has they definitely been saved? This is the question James asked *"If a man says he has faith and has not works, can this sort of faith save him?"* (James 2:14).

Naturally, such a seemingly radical question set James' readers thinking, as it should set all of us to thinking. For we all have a tendency to take this matter of being a Christian far too lightly. We say, "Just believe... that's all!"

But, that is not all! Simple faith in Christ alone is all that is needed for salvation, of course, but, once a person is saved, they have been born again, and they must show by a changed life that they have been joined to Christ. So, James felt that an illustration from every day life would be in order.

"If a brother or a sister is ill clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled, without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit?" (James 2:15).

Perhaps, at first glance, we might have a tendency to say, "Oh, this couldn't happen in Christian circles. No Christian would be so heartless!" Don't be too sure!

Some years ago, when I first began to preach, I was conducting a service in a mission-church in New York City. At the close of the service, I invited any present who wanted to discuss their spiritual problems to come up to the

front to talk to me following the benediction. A young man in his early twenties came forward after the benediction was pronounced. After I talked to him for about twenty minutes - it was my privilege to lead him to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. We then went out to tell the rest of the folk, some of whom were still standing around talking. They all said that they were delighted to know of the conversion. Some echoed the young man's testimony by "Praise the Lord!"

Then I told them that the young man had eaten nothing all day and had no place to sleep that night, and wondered whether some of them would be able to assist in some way. Immediately, one by one, they began to drift away. "It, is getting late; my wife's out in the car; it's time I started home. These were their weak excuses. The fact that, just a few moments before, they were seemingly content to spend another half hour or more in talking, did not seem to matter. Finally, it was up to the mission superintendent and myself to get enough money together to help the young man who had just received Christ. This sort of thing is exactly what James is talking about.

We have many illustrations of this same situation all about us, which we take for granted. A Christian brother or sister is in need, and our response is so inadequate and superficial.

Perhaps one of the most tragic illustrations is the way so many churches treat their missionaries. We send them old hand-me-downs to wear. We pay them far below any minimum wage scale. The average missionary virtually never has the money to buy a new book to read or study. I suspect it could be demonstrated that many missionaries are subsisting on a most inadequate diet.

Yet, when they come home on furlough, they must face the utter farce of insincere welcomes. A lot of pumped up enthusiasm for them, when they know from experience, that it is not genuine. Again, this is precisely to what James is referring. In fact, we might say that many churches treat their pastors the same way. "Bless you Pastor, that was an excellent sermon! What? Do you have some need? Well, Pastor, the Lord will provide! Goodbye Pastor."

James asks, in the light of this, "What's all this talk about faith? What profit is it, if it does not produce kindness, consideration, generosity - good works?" And, he adds in verse seventeen, "*Faith, by itself, if it has no works, is dead.*"

However, along about this time, James anticipated that there would be some rather vehement objections. After all, you don't ruffle the fur the wrong way without making some enemies. So, in our text, James was prepared by setting forth three possible arguments that he might receive and answer these arguments. Let's consider them in order.

1. THE FIRST ARGUMENT

"But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and by my works I will show you my faith." (James 2:18). Without doubt, James was describing himself in conflict with an objector. A man comes up to James and says, "Now, look here, James. I don't agree with you. You claim it is necessary to have good works in your Christian life. I disagree! I believe, and that's what counts! I've got faith; that's better than good works."

James listened patiently for a moment and then said, "All right, friend. I'll buy that! You've got faith! Show it to me! Let me see your faith!"

The opponent replies, "Don't be silly: How can I show you my faith? It's not something you can see. James responds by saying, "Oh, I can show you my faith. My faith can be seen by my works."

And this is true. You cannot look into a person's heart to see if he truly believes in Christ. Only God can do that. But, if a person tells me he loves the Lord, and he lives a good, consistent, Christian life, that's proof enough for me that His faith is shown by his works. And this is exactly what James was saying.

2. THE SECOND ARGUMENT

But then, the second objector came along. He said to James, "James, all this talk about works is unnecessary. My position is this: believe in God! In fact, my faith is stated in the Old Testament Shema, 'Hear O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one' (Deuteronomy 6:4)." So, you see, James, it is faith - belief - that counts."

To this argument, James simply replied (v. 19), "That's fine, my friend, I'm very glad to know that you do believe. But did you ever stop to think that the demons believe in one God? And that they shudder because of their belief? Does this belief do them any good? Of course not! The very idea is absurd." Thus, James silenced the second opponent.

3. THE THIRD ARGUMENT

After the second objector went away, the final argument was brought before James. This third objector was the conservative traditionalist. With a chip on

his shoulder, daring James to knock it off, he said, "Give me a proof text, chapter and verse, to prove that faith without works is dead."

Now, frankly, we do not have this third objection given in our text. But we may infer it from verse twenty. James' answer: "Do you want to be shown, you foolish fellow, that faith apart from works is barren?" Clearly, this was an answer to a man who was demanding a proof text. "Show me from Scripture." "I won't believe it until I see it in the Bible."

Do you know there are some people who will not believe anything unless you can give them chapter and verse definite proof text. Now, understand that proof texts can be good. But there are many things in the Christian life for which no proof texts can really be found. For example, you cannot find a proof text in the Bible for the Sunday school, the Sunday evening evangelistic service, the Wednesday evening prayer meeting, the church board of trustees, church bulletins, church pews, a church secretary, or many other features of modern church life. Yet, totally apart from proof texts, we make use of these devices and personnel in our churches. Certainly there is no reason why these functions and features cannot be enjoyed without proof texts.

Besides, proof texts can sometimes be dangerous and detrimental. You have heard the old saying, "You can prove almost anything by the Bible, if you take texts out of their context." The classic example is, of course, Matthew 27:5, where we read, "*Judas went out and hanged himself.*" Couple this with Luke 10:37, "*Go, and do thou likewise,*" and you have a proof text for suicide. And, to speed it up a bit, add a dash of John 13:27, "*That which thou doest, do quickly.*"

But, more seriously, see how some churches split over such a "proof text" as 2 Corinthians 6:17, when it is taken out of its context: "*Come out from among them and be separate.*" Oh! How much tragedy and sin has been perpetrated under the guise of following this text."

Or, see what silly nonsense some cultists have engaged in by teaching that it is possible to reach a sinless state in this life, based on a "proof text" 1 John 3:9, taken out of its context. "*He who is born of God does not commit sin.*" We must not forget that there are some things about the Christian life on which the Scripture is silent. There is no direct command. We must therefore use principles, since there are no "proof texts" available.

Yet, here was an objector coming to James and saying, "Give me a proof text to prove what you say, that faith without works is dead." It was as if he were

saying, "I dare you to prove it by Scripture, and even if you do show me, I won't believe it." You see, some people hang a sign over their heads, "My mind is made up Please do not confuse me with the facts."

A couple of years ago, there was an interesting item in Time Magazine which illustrates this principle perfectly. The commanding officer of a certain marine training camp, was reported to be furious when one of the cheap, sexy magazines, Cavalier, said that the famous Marine Corps hymn was inaccurate. The hymn says, "From the halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli." The marines have always been ready to fight. Yet, the article in Cavalier pointed out that only eight marines were at Tripoli, and of the seven thousand troops at the halls of Montezuma during the battle of Chapultepec, less than two hundred were actually marines.

The commanding general was furious on reading this. And, when he could be reached for a statement, he said, "How should I know how many marines were there? I don't know if any were there. But I've believed it for thirty-three years, and I am going to go right on believing it." This is the same attitude as the third objector who came to James, and who said in essence, "My mind is made up. I dare you to prove differently from Scripture, And even if you do, I will still go right on believing what I do.

How different should be our attitude. We ought to be open-minded, willing to see the light, even if it means changing our minds. Apparently, James had to contend with some closed minds, and so he said, "Do you want to be shown that faith without works is dead? All right, will give you two Scripture illustrations: Abraham and Rahab." In these two Old Testament, Scriptural personalities, James had excellent illustrations for his thesis that faith without works is dead.

ABRAHAM

It is interesting that both Paul and James used Abraham as an illustration for two seemingly different things. In Romans 4:1-5, St. Paul shows that God counted Abraham righteous because of his faith, without works. James, as seen in our text, seems to say exactly the opposite - that Abraham was counted righteous because of his works.

Actually, there is no contradiction. Paul was discussing Abraham's relation to God. "Abraham believed God, and God counted him righteous because of this faith" (Romans 4:3). After all, God sees the heart, He does not need proof by works. He knows whether a person's faith is genuine.

James, on the other hand, was talking about Abraham relationship to man. Abraham had long been known as a Godly man who lived close to the Lord and really trusted Him. But this was all hearsay to Abraham's servants and fellow men. How could they know if Abraham was "on the level" with regard to his faith in God? They could not see his heart, as God could. They had to be shown in some clear-cut example.

So, God gave them that opportunity. He demanded that Abraham offer His son as a burnt sacrifice. A terrible thing for a father to have to face. Yet, Abraham's associates and servants watched with interest. This would be a crucial test of his faith. If he came through this ordeal with his faith intact, they would be convinced that it was the real thing, this faith of Abraham.

Well, he did come through unscathed. And even as Abraham was justified before God by his faith (as Paul said), so he was justified before his fellow man by the translation of his faith in to works (as James here tells us) So, Paul and James do not contradict each other; they supplement each other in beautiful harmony.

RAHAB

The other biblical proof of faith without works being dead is in Rahab's life. Rahab was a woman who lived in the city of Jericho about the time the children of Israel were going to capture the city. Joshua's spies came to Rahab and explained that God was about to take the city. Rahab believed and had faith in God's power.

But, even if Rahab had all the faith in the world, it would not have saved the necks of those spies when the King of Jericho sent a searching party out to arrest them. Rahab's faith in God would have been known to Him, of course. But, by her willingness to conceal the spies from the search party, Rahab put her faith to work, thus showing it to Joshua's spies.

So the issue is clear. Our personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior alone can save us. No works may enter in at this point under any circumstances. But, ask yourself, "Is it enough to say, I believe," "I have faith in Christ?" Is it not also necessary, in the light of our study, to put our faith to work?

Truly, faith without works is dead. But faith that develops into works under the Holy Spirit's direction is the basis of a successful, balanced, happy Christian life.

CHAPTER TEN THE USE AND ABUSE OF SPEECH

James 3:1-12

1 Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness. 2 For we all make many mistakes, and if any one makes no mistakes in what he says he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also. 3 If we put bits into the mouths of horses that they may obey us, we guide their whole bodies. 4 Look at the ships also; though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. 5 So the tongue is a little member and boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire!

6 And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is an unrighteous world among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the cycle of nature, [a] and set on fire by hell. [b] 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by humankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brethren, this ought not to be so. 11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening fresh water and brackish? 12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

James has already briefly touched upon the theme of "speech " in 1:19, "*Let every man to quick to hear, slow to speak.*" Now, he has reached a point in which it is necessary to elaborate on the whole issue. So, twelve full verses are devoted to the advantages and the disadvantages, or dangers of speech. The reader is encouraged to take the 'time just now to read. these twelve verses of chapter three (just above) .

I wonder if we realize how much can be discovered about a person's real self, just by listening to his speech. Publilius Syrus, a Latin writer who lived some years before the birth of Christ, once said "Speech is a mirror of the soul; as a man speaks, so is he." This is far more true than some of us perhaps think. By just listening to the way a person talks, we have a vast insight into the sort of person he actually is.

For example, the slovenly speaker who slurs over his words, is usually a person who is careless and inconsiderate. The person who mumbles almost inaudibly is an introvert, withdrawn, antisocial. The speaker who clutters his speech with sixty-four dollar, long, difficult words, or pads his talk with unnecessary description, is usually a conceited, proud, vain individual. It is very interesting to listen to conversations. You can learn ever so much about a person by observing his speech peculiarities. For, speech is, indeed, the mirror of the soul.

James, knew this too, and this is why he has made such a large issue out of speaking in our text. In order to introduce his theme, James used the teacher as an object lesson. Probably this was because the teacher depends so strongly on human speech to put a lesson across. Now, of course, the teacher James had in mind in verse one, was a religious teacher, Possibly, an itinerant Bible teacher or a local church teacher. Never forget that one of the distinct gifts of the Holy Spirit is the gift of teaching.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he outlined a few of these divine gifts: "*He gave some (churches) apostles; to some (churches) he gave prophets, some, evangelists, some shepherds and teachers....*" (Ephesians 4:11).

In other words, God knew exactly what each church needed. An apostle, to organize the work and give it authority. A prophet, to stir up a dormant church. An evangelist, to win the unsaved to Christ. A pastor, to shepherd the flock. And a teacher, to feed and instruct growing saints. God still knows today what each church needs and supplies each church willing to allow Him to direct in the selection of a leader. All of these workers in the church contributed ultimately to one goal, "*For the equipment of the saints, unto the work of service leading up to the building up of the body of Christ*" (Ephesians 4:12).

So, this was the teacher's job too, whether the teacher were itinerant or settled. He was to help build up the body of Christ, the Church. Actually, this is a tremendous responsibility with a holy obligation to God. For this reason, a person ought to think seriously before desiring to become a teacher. This is why James said, "*Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness*" (James 3:1).

There are many denominations which believe in annual drives to urge young men in the congregation to choose the ministry as a life work. And within our churches, there are frequent attempts to corral members into teaching in the

Sunday school. Both of these moves are foolish. No one should ever be urged to be a teacher or a minister, without a clear warning of the responsibility involved. Nor should anyone ever be encouraged to undertake these duties without a definite call from God. For the teacher is charged with the holy obligation of training others, imparting knowledge, so that others may grow.

In a very real sense, of course, we are all teachers. For every Christian who acquires some knowledge concerning spiritual things becomes a steward with an obligation to teach that truth to others. This is a part of Christian stewardship - sharing our light with others. But, the person who aspires to being a teacher of Christian truth on a permanent basis is under a much heavier burden. This would be the minister, the Bible teacher, the missionary, the teacher in the Christian school system, the Sunday school teacher, the public school teacher, parents with children - all such teachers must answer to the Lord, not only for their own lives, but for their faithfulness in instructing those under their charge such teachers have the knowledge of the truth in Jesus Christ; therefore, they are under orders to make that truth known by precept or example.

Recall our Lord's words: *"To whom much is given, of him much shall be required"* (Luke 12:48). Therefore, because of this heavy obligation to God. Again, James says, *"Do not desire to be a teacher since you will be judged with that much stricter judgment. But, if God calls you to a teaching ministry, perform it with all your heart"* (James 3:1).

One of the reasons why teaching others is such a great responsibility, is stated in verse two, "We all make mistakes." This is certainly something we do not have to prove. It is for this reason that pencils have erasers, mimeograph stencils are sold with correction fluid, ink eradicators and paint removers are available on the market. We all make mistakes, and need to correct them from time to time.

It is at this point that James makes the transition from just talking about teachers, and goes on to talking about the daily speech patterns of all of us. For, whether you are engaged in teaching a Sunday school class each week, or whether you simply teach others by your every day walk with Jesus Christ, you use speech to convey your thoughts to other people. And, be sure of this: Your speech will betray you; it will give you away. You can do untold good by what you say; or you can do an awful lot of harm.

Thus, in verse two, James says, *"For we all make many mistakes, for if anyone makes no mistakes in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body."* Did you ever stop to realize how easily we can make

mistakes by our speaking? For example, we say the wrong thing, untactfully and thus we offend someone, drive someone away, give the wrong impression. Or, we use an unfortunate word or phrase which we may think to be all right, but others consider crude, obnoxious, undignified. Or, it is even possible to say the right thing, but to say it at the wrong time.

In each case, we make a mistake - or, as the King James Version renders it, "*we offend in word.*" Sometimes, the mistake is capable of being rectified. But just as often, our offense in word will lose friends for Christ.

When I was a student in seminary, one of my classmates was a very zealous soul-winner. He loved the Lord, and desired to see people won to Christ. But, more often than not, he drove people away from Christianity simply because of his crude manner of speaking. For he almost used gutter language to try to bring highly cultured people to Christ. It simply did not work.

Speech is the key to much of our success in the Christian life. Not that we must be great orators. But we must constantly seek to glorify the Lord by what we say and allow the Lord to guard the way we say it. The psalmist had this in mind when he wrote, "Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3).

In this second verse, James tells us that if anyone succeeds in avoiding the pitfalls of speech, he thus proves himself to be a "perfect" or mature Christian. For if a child of God can keep his speech in check, he is surely a well disciplined individual, and probably carries this discipline over into all areas of life. Consequently, "*if anyone makes no mistakes in what he says, he is a perfect mature man, able also to bridle his whole body*" (v. 2). In other words, if a man can demonstrate his maturity at one point, he can also demonstrate it elsewhere.

It is at this point that our text furnishes two illustrations - The bridle in the horse's mouth, and the rudder of a ship. But first, stop a moment. Do you realize how quickly the human body is influenced or affected by little things? Only a tiny speck of dust in the eye can cause great discomfort. A tiny splinter under the skin can fester and cause infection. A small corn or bunion on the foot can create a great deal of pain. A few cold germs can stir up fever, runny nose, coughing, sneezing, watery eyes, and other miseries.

So, an unruly tongue can stir up a hornet's nest. Martin Luther used to refer to the tongue as "that little bit of flesh between the jaws." But what trouble our speech can cause when it is not under the control of the Holy Spirit.

James uses these two illustrations to show how effective a small mechanism can be for good or for evil.

"If we put bits into the mouths of horses that they may obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Look at the ships also; though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs" (James 3:3-4).

A small piece of metal inserted into a horse's mouth is enough to control his powerful body, for good or evil. For, a skilled horseman can maneuver a horse in just about any direction, through the proper use of the bit. Whereas an unskilled rider by tugging and pulling the reins wrongly, can drive a horse into a mad frenzy. Similarly, a trained sea captain can do marvels with his ship - all through the proper use of the helm and rudder, while a novice at the helm can easily run the ship onto the rocks.

So, in the same way (our text assures us) "the tongue is a little member" capable of great things. It can make or break a Christian life. It can win people to Jesus Christ and the Church or it can drive them away. Remember, it does not take much to ruin a great program of witness for Jesus Christ. Just a few unguarded words of selfishness or criticism will undo much that has been done for Jesus Christ.

During one of my pastorates, I sought to build enduring Christian lives by a constructive Bible teaching ministry. Quite a bit of progress had been made, when a few critical tongues started wagging, not to me, but to the people in the community. Thus, on several occasions, when I called on prospects for membership, I would happen be asked a very blunt question: "What's happening in your church? There seems to be some dissatisfaction. I've heard about it in the community." Thus, through the concerted efforts of a few disgruntled individuals, much of what I tried to do was sabotaged simply through the wrong use of the tongues of these few people. Every pastor can offer similar illustrations. My situation was not unique by any means. But this is the sort of thing James was talking about when he said, "How great a forest can be burned down by some small sparks of fire" (v. 5). And, in verse six, he adds, lest anyone miss the point, "the tongue is such a fire.

Another way in which the Lord's work can be sabotaged is through gossip. This gossip can be intentional and malicious or unintentional, without any particularly evil intent or purpose. All too many Christians have loose Tongues. They hear something that is not common knowledge, and can't wait to get on the phone or meet someone to spread the word, spiced up with

some added details which were not part of the original story. Especially, this is so if the person who told them the news said, "Now don't tell anyone this. That's the signal to pass it along doubly quick. There are also Christians who can, in just a few words of gossip, tear some other Christian's reputation to shreds, or disillusion a prospective Christian by caustic comments. All of this is caused by an overactive tongue. And James says, *"How great a forest can be burned down by some small sparks of fire. The tongue is such a fire."*

Finally, to illustrate further his point that the tongue and human speech can be either good or dangerous, James offers a series of pictures to all, to describe unforgettably the power of speech for good or evil.

(1) A FIRE

In verse six, the first vivid likeness of the tongue is fire, as we have just noticed. What a sense of terror goes through the mind when the cry "fire" is sounded. For fire can destroy so quickly and can leave such ruin in its path, without respect of persons. So also the tongue of man with its bitter, caustic use, can ruin reputations, and destroy worthy work.

(2) AN UNRIGHTEOUS WORLD

The second vivid description of the tongue is "an unrighteous world." To understand what James had in mind, we must think of a council meeting in which a leader is to be appointed. So, verse six says, "the tongue is appointed from among the members of the body as an unrighteous ruler." It is as if the rest of the bodily members appointed the tongue to be the spokesman and orderer of affairs. And what a vicious spokesman the tongue can be.

(3) STAINER OF THE BODY

Thirdly, the tongue is a stainer or defiler of the whole body, Did you ever notice how when a person begins to use foul speech, gradually his whole outlook on life degenerates? His thoughts become licentious, his actions become objectionable. Thus, the tongue succeeds in staining the whole person.

(4) SETS ON FIRE THE CYCLE OF NATURE AND IS SET ON FIRE BY HELL

The fourth picture calls forth a vision of fire once again. The phrase, "cycle of nature" literally means "wheel of birth.". When a person is born into the world, his life begins, and he proceeds down the road of life like a wheel rolling along. Only, James says, this wheel is on fire, ignited by hell itself and burning all in its path. The picture is undoubtedly that of ancient war chariots which would have flaming torches fixed to their wheels, to set on fire the enemies territory as the chariot rolled along. This is what human speech can

be a fiery wheel of life, burning, destroying as it goes, receiving its original igniting spark from hell itself.

(5) UNTAMABLE

In verse seven, the text tells us that virtually every sort of animal life can be tamed. But, the vicious tongue, controlled by an unregenerate heart, cannot be tamed by man. For while human speech may be the vocal means of doing damage, it is the heart of man which bears the full responsibility, Jesus Himself once said that it is *"out of the heart that false witness and slander come"* (Matt. 15:19). All of the methods man has tried to curb his foul speech cannot succeed, as long as the source of evil - the heart - is not cleansed. In this connection, remember:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9).

(6) A RESTLESS EVIL, FULL OF DEADLY POISON

The tongue of man is, as verse eight says, a restless evil and full of poison. This image brings to mind the descriptive words of Isaiah, *"the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot rest; and its waters churn up mire and dirt. There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked"* (Isaiah 57:20-21). And again, the words of the psalmist, *"Deliver me, O Lord, from evil men... who plan evil things in their hearts and stir up trouble continually. 'They make their tongue sharp as a serpent's, and under their lips is the poison of vipers"* (Psalm 140:1-3). This is what the speech of the unchristian heart is ---restless, unstable, poisonous.

To conclude his analysis of the evils of speech, James points to the utter inconsistency of so much of our speaking (vv. 9-12).

9 With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brethren, this ought not to be so. 11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening fresh water and brackish? 12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

Just as a fresh spring will always send forth fresh water, and a brackish spring will always produce bitter water; just as fig trees always produce figs and olive trees, olives - so it should follow that the same tongue that can praise God, should speak well to man also. But why this inconsistency that James saw in his day and which we still see in our own generation? There is but one answer. The bridle bit is held by the wrong hands; the rudder is not grasped

by the Lord, but by our own strength; the source of the spring is not pure; the tongue is not under the control of the Lord.

Only as Jesus Christ is Lord of our lives including our tongues, will we find that our ways will be properly directed. This alone is the secret of true Christian living. Therefore, let the prayer of our lives and hearts be:

"Take my lips and let them be Filled with messages for Thee ; Take my voice and let me sing Always, only, for my King."¹

¹ Frances Ridley Havergal, "Take My Life and Let It Be," (1874)

CHAPTER ELEVEN **WISDOM – DIVINE AND DEVILISH**

James 3:13-18

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good life let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15 This wisdom is not such as comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity. 18 And the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

In our previous study we discussed the subject of the use and abuse of human speech. We pointed out that God gave man the ability to speak, to communicate with his fellow man and with God. But, speech is an amoral factor: That is, it is neither good nor bad in itself, but capable of becoming good or bad, depending on the use to which it is put.

Recently, I saw something in a New York subway which both surprised me and gave me an illustration of this very point. I was riding in the subway just at the time high schools were dismissing their last classes. A whole group of loud-mouthed high school boys got on the train and stood at the end of the car. Their conversation was vulgar and obscene. Each boy was trying to outdo the others in the use of foul language.

Suddenly, a man who was standing near the boys went over to the loudest of them and slapped him hard across the mouth. In plain, tough (though not profane) language, he reproved the boy in no uncertain terminology. The other loud-mouths just stood there, amazed, not believing their eyes. But the train ride was silent from that point on.

Here, you see, were two examples of the use of human speech. One of them was foul, vile, obscene, corrupt, and dirty - having no good purpose whatever. The other was harsh and strong, but with good purpose and intention. So it is with all of our speech. It is either uplifting or degrading. It either contributes something for the good of others, or it chops away at the foundations of justice, goodness, dignity, or Godliness.

However, we must not forget that speech originates in the mind. Every word we speak begins as a thought in our minds. The thought is dropped into the brain and the brain sends a message to the speech organs, and the thought is thus translated into words.

In addition, there is something behind our thoughts as well. Our thoughts are prompted by the sort of wisdom we have. For example, if a person's total upbringing has been in secular and non-religious realms, his thoughts will be secular rather than sacred. That is, the man who has been steeped in philosophical and scientific thought from his childhood on, will have few thoughts which do not have a philosophical or scientific tinge.

On the other hand, a man who is reared in a strong religious family and then sent to parochial school and enrolled in a monastery somewhere, will have his thoughts strongly colored by the sacred wisdom through which he has passed. In short, we can say that the thoughts we think are largely the product of the sort of wisdom in which we live, and which we have absorbed. This wisdom (sacred or secular) produces thoughts. The thoughts produce words or speech. This is the sort of thing our text discusses, *"Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good life let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom."*

Knowledge is a wonderful thing. The true Christian will always want to gain as much knowledge as he can. For, the more we know, the more we can use that knowledge to more effectively serve the Lord. After all, this is the primary purpose of all true knowledge as far as the Christian is concerned. We gain knowledge not merely to fill up the empty spaces in our heads with facts, but that we might be better servants of Jesus Christ our Lord.

However, there are different types of knowledge. There is theoretical knowledge, speculative knowledge, practical knowledge, etc. For example, a very simple illustration will point this out. Suppose a friend looks out the window and says, "Oh my! It is raining out." if you are a practical person you will probably say, "Thanks for telling me. Now I'll wear my raincoat, rubbers and take an umbrella." This is what I mean by practical knowledge or wisdom.

But if you are speculative thinker, and someone tells you it is raining, you immediately respond, "How do you know it's raining?" Are you sure? Couldn't it be someone spraying his lawn, or a bathtub upstairs overflowing and the water pouring past your window? And, if you do take your umbrella, what guarantee do you have that it will open and keep you dry?" Here is knowledge used in an entirely different way.

James includes both these types - practical wisdom and theoretical wisdom - when he asks, "Who is wise?" - i.e., who has practical knowledge? - And "who is understanding" - i.e., who has theoretical knowledge among you? Regardless of the type of thinker you may be, however, our text insists that you have a holy obligation to God and man. "By his good life, let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom."

The King James Version renders "good life" as "good conversation." There was a time in the history of our English language when "conversation" meant not just talking, but the whole way of life. There is a very fascinating history of the Greek word which is translated "life " or "conversation" in the two versions. It's earliest meaning was "to turn upside down." Later, the same word came to mean "a turning around, or a reversal." Gradually, however, it has come to mean "a going back and forth, or a walk through life." Do you see the likeness to the Christian life involved in this gradual transformation of a Greek word? When we are first born again, our lives are turned upside down. There is a terrific upheaval in our thinking and living. Then, as a result of the new birth, there is a turning around, a reversal, a heading in the new direction. And then, there is our daily routine walk back and forth, with the Savior.

Now, James says, it is by this good life that we show our good works in the meekness of wisdom. Notice that phrase, "the meekness of wisdom." How different this is from the haughty attitude of pride so many people acquire. It is usually the person with a little knowledge who becomes most unbearable.

In the question and answer period in one of my Bible classes, someone asked me if I realized that so many church people are snobs. My answer was, "Yes, unfortunately!" Particularly, this is so among some of our more conservative brethren. Many believers gain just a little knowledge of the Word of God, and they think they have "the world by the tail." The Christian who really knows the Lord and walks with Him can never be a spiritual snob. It's the person who knows about the Lord who looks down upon others with disdain. This is the pride of knowledge. Our text calls on us to have "meekness of wisdom" rather than pride of knowledge.

Now, in verse 14, we find a very strong warning against two very common faults: (1) bitter jealousy and (2) selfish ambition. "But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth."

We do not have to look far in our churches, or even in our own hearts, to find these two sins in evidence. One soloist in the choir, for example, may be jealous because another soloist is given special songs to sing. One member of the church is envious of another because of more expensive clothes. One minister is jealous of another minister who has a bigger church. This sort of thing goes on all the time, either in an openly expressed way, or, more often, harbored as deep seated resentment.

The Greek word for "jealousy" is *zelos* from which we get the English word "zeal." Now, it is an excellent thing for a Christian to have zeal, ardor, enthusiasm, and fervor. But mere zeal by itself can be a damaging characteristic.

Here is a man, for instance, who sees a house on fire and he has great zeal to help put out the fire. So, he finds some buckets of gasoline and prepares to drown the fire with gasoline. True, he knows that water would be better, but there is no water nearby. So, on the premise that any liquid is better than no liquid, he uses gasoline, feeling that, after all, it 's wet, like water. You know very well what will happen to this zealous man if he pours gasoline on the fire. This is zeal, but it is zeal without knowledge.

Now, the text (v .14) talks of "bitter zeal," which is jealousy. The Greek word for "bitter" is *pikros*. When I was in the United States Army during the Second World War, one of our phases of training included chemical warfare. We were given a quick whiff of various sorts of poison gas which the enemy used in previous wars. One of these gases was called chloropicrin. It was a combination of chlorine compounds and picric acid. The primary purpose of the gas was to irritate eyes, nasal membranes and lungs. The picric acid caused the irritation.

Our text uses the same word *pikros*, to describe the irritation which a false zeal causes. Zeal without knowledge irritates. It can lead to jealousy and hatred. No Christian should tolerate any such feelings towards others.

The other factor which can have no place in our lives as Christians is "selfish ambition." Frequently, such selfish ambition is the outgrowth of jealousy, For the word literally means, "an attempt to gain one's end by the use of underhanded methods."

During my senior year in college, the director of Christian service sent me to candidate at a church which was seeking a pastor. However, one of the seniors in the seminary department heard about my assignment and was jealous - as I later discovered. He felt that, since he was in the seminary department

and I, only a college student, the opportunity should have been given to him. So, in order to make sure he would be called as pastor of this church, he resorted to underhanded methods. He put in his appearance on the same day I was scheduled to preach and insisted that the director of Christian service had sent him, not me. Furthermore, he reminded me that I was only a college student, and that he was a seminarian. Well, the plan backfired and he lost the church... while I received the call. But the point is, the very thing James was describing in this word "selfish ambition" is all too prevalent in Christian circles. Yet, James commands, "if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not boast about it and be false to the truth" (v. 14).

Indeed, in the next verse, he went on to say that the type of wisdom which would produce jealous thoughts of selfish ambition does not come from God. Instead, such thinking is "earthly, unspiritual, devilish." (v. 15).

At the opening of this chapter, I suggested that our speech is governed by our thoughts. Our thoughts, in turn, proceed from the knowledge we have gained. And this knowledge will either be largely secular or sacred, depending on our environment or surroundings. This is what our text (v. 15) refers to. If our wisdom and knowledge lead to jealousy and selfish ambition, this wisdom and knowledge do not come from God, for God is not the author of selfishness and envy among humans. Instead, the knowledge which leads to such sinfulness must come from man's own willfulness. It is earthly, sensuous and devilish.

Isn't it strange that we Americans, who can be so heavenly-minded with relation to satellites, missiles, rockets, astronauts, etc. can be so earthly-minded in relation to the things of being governed by the true spiritual realities spiritual" or "sensual." Literally, this word is "soulish" and means that the person is governed by the soul or the self – the old Adamic nature.

You see, the Bible teaches that man is composed of body, soul and spirit. The body is the outward house of the invisible soul and spirit. Actually, every person is governed by the soul or the spirit in every decision of life. The soul is the self-consciousness consisting of intellect, emotions and human wills. The spirit, on the other hand, is the person's God-consciousness. Every person, all the way through life, is subject either to one or the other of these forces. At any given moment, you and I are obedient either to the soul, or to the spirit.

For example, turn for a moment to 1 Corinthians 2:14. There, the Apostle Paul discusses the "natural" man. The word, again, is "soulish," The soulish

man is the person whose life is being run by his soul or human self - the old Adamic nature. Such a person does not see spiritual truth clearly. Rather, it seems foolish and nonsensical to him. However, the person who has turned over the control of his life to the Lord is governed by his spirit which is in touch with the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 2:15). Such a person is able to discern eternal truth which is absolutely incomprehensible to the soul-centered person.

Now, in our text in the book of James, we find a warning that both the unsaved man and the Christian who is self-centered instead of spirit-centered, are in great danger. When they speak, think, plan, talk, they fail to discern the will of God because self is on the throne of their lives making their choices for them. Indeed, it is because such a person is so unwilling to look beyond his own feeble intellectual powers to the wisdom of God, that he plays right into the hands of the devil, and his thoughts, ideas and plans are demonic instead of spiritual.

Sad to say, this earthly, soulish, demonic wisdom (v. 15) is the wisdom by which our great world powers are governed. It is the wisdom has been by which the United Nations led. Our great universities are run on this basis. For, the devil is the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4), and has tremendous influence and control over those who are not committed to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It is he who inspires the earthly, sensual, demonic wisdom of the unregenerate world.

Verse 16 goes on to assure us that wherever this jealousy and selfish grasping desire are found, there will also be disorder and confusion and every vile practice.

I remind you that this principle holds true whether it be the Christian church, world governments, institutions of learning, the home, the business world, labor relations, politics, the entertainment industry, etc. Wherever the earthly, sensual, demonic influences seen in jealousy and selfish ambition, are manifested, there will also be disorder, confusion and every sort of vile practice (v. 16). You need not take my word for it. Apply the principle to the situations in the world and see for yourself.

Let us not forget that when God first created man, it was His stated intention that man should have dominion over the creation (Genesis 1:26-28). Yet, by his sinful rebellion, his willingness to listen to Satan rather than God, man forfeited his rights to control over the creation. In his own strength, man has sought to run his own life and his world, but he has consistently made a mess of it. Materially and intellectually, man has made

phenomenal progress through the centuries. But morally, he has lagged far behind, since he has been out of touch with the Lord. Think of the many attempts which have been made to secure peace in the world. There have been leagues, courts, councils, peace talks, summit conferences, United Nations, etc. But, at best, all man has managed to obtain is cold war - restrained hostility. And the world sits on the proverbial powder keg with baited breath, waiting for the explosion to come.

God has shown man again and again that when he tries to do things in his own strength as a "soulish" individual, these attempts will ultimately end in failure and disaster. As James put it, *"where the spirit of jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will [always] be disorder and every vile practice"* (v. 16).

How different the wisdom which comes from the Lord, "The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity. (v. 17) Let me just contrast the wisdom found in the world with that which God has given us in Christ and His Word.

Wisdom of the World

Impure; Obscene
Inciting to war
Vicious; Inconsiderate
Adamant; Intransigent
Fixed; Full of contempt
Calloused; Evil
Carnal deeds; Prejudiced
Vacillating; filled with sham
Superficiality; Artificiality

Wisdom from Above

Pure
Peaceable
Gentle
Open to reason
Yielding
Full of mercy
Good fruits
Without uncertainty or
Partiality without hypocrisy

With such a contrast, there can be no doubt as to who is the present god of this age - the devil. *"The carnal mind [of man] is enmity against God. For it is not subject to God's law; nor indeed, can be"* (Rom. 8: 7). *"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ"* (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Oh what a holy obligation the Christian has to live the life of total commitment to Christ as Lord, in this time of spiritual darkness. As verse 18 puts it, *"the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by the peacemakers"* (v. 18). To us, as Christians, has been committed the task of being peacemakers, to bring those who are separated from God by enmity into fellowship with Him through Jesus Christ. This can only be done by us when we are fully controlled by God's Holy Spirit.

May this be our desire at all times.

CHAPTER TWELVE THE CAUSE OF HOSTILITY

James 4:1-6

1 What causes wars, and what causes fightings among you? Is it not your passions that are at war in your members? 2 You desire and do not have; so you kill. And you covet[a] and cannot obtain; so you fight and wage war. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. 4 Unfaithful creatures! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you suppose it is in vain that the scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit which he has made to dwell in us"? 6 But he gives more grace; therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

Through the many centuries of human history, wars have been commonplace. Everywhere on the face of the earth, men have fought against their fellowmen for one reason or another. There has never been a nation, tribe or people who have not, at some time, faced the ravages of war. In spite of untold destruction, sorrow, carnage and death which war always brings, no one seems to have found an antidote or preventative for war. Whenever a war comes to an end, one side claims to be the winner - the other side is declared the loser. Yet, when all is said and done, is there ever any real winner in war? Actually, everyone loses. Homes are destroyed, property ravaged, loved ones killed or maimed, prestige is wounded, popularity shaken and a nation's closeness to God is oftentimes severely shaken. You see, no one really wins in the game of war.

Scientific men, for years, have been trying to discover the real causes of war. The psychologist, the sociologist, the historian, the student of government - all have been seeking for causes of wars. Every time a new war or skirmish is fought, historians write new books in which they itemize the "causes of the conflict. But, in the last analysis, war has only one main cause. At the risk of being accused of oversimplification, I will go on record as saying that the really basic cause of every war is selfishness, man wanting his own way. And, whether it be an individual, personal argument, or a gang war, a national or civil war, or a world war - the really basic, fundamental cause will always be selfishness - men and nations wanting their own way.

This is what initiated the war of the angels against God. Lucifer said, "I will..." instead of "God's will." The same self-centeredness precipitated man's warfare against God. Adam said, in essence, "I will do what I want to do and when I want to do it, and no one is going to tell me what fruit I can or cannot eat on any particular tree. Through the centuries, Adam's descendant's have continued to act with this same arrogance and independence wanting their own way.

Now, someone may say, "Isn't such independence and self-will necessary at times? After all, where would America be, if there had been no independent spirit to separate from Great Britain, for instance?" This is very true, but it must be remembered that wherever there is a spirit of wanting your own way, call it independence if you wish, there will also be the very real possibility of warfare and conflict. Whether the spirit of independence is right or wrong is beside the point. There will be war or conflict sooner or later. For a self-centered, independent spirit of wanting your own way is a basic cause of war. Of course, sometimes the price is worth paying and the benefits that accrue from a spirit of independence justify the hostilities

However, we need to keep this in mind as we look at our text. James asks and answers the question, "What causes war?"

(1) DEFINITION

The first thing we must do as we come to examine our text is to define the two main words at the opening of verse one: "wars" and "fightings." We shall never understand the second verse, unless we see that James is speaking of two different groups: those out in the world at large, and the followers of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps, if I paraphrase the opening question, we may be able to have a better grasp of James' thought, "What is the cause of wars out in the world at large?" And, "What causes similar fightings among you Christians?" The Greek word translated "wars" [*Polemo*] is a term which suggests a chronic, long-standing condition of hostility, which might flare up into a white hot battle at any time.

A good illustration of this is the "cold war" in which, at this writing, the United States and the free world are engaged with the Soviet Union and the communist world at large. This "cold war" commenced after World War II when Russia began to assert herself and make unprecedented demands on the free world. Since that time, this underlying spirit of hostility has continued, with frequent blow-ups in various sections of the world, Those who are familiar with the course of contemporary history are aware of the

chronic condition of "cold war" with occasional flare-ups into the white heat of battle. Korea, Indo-China, Laos, the Congo crisis, riots in Japan, the student riot in San Francisco, the United Nations furor and the Berlin question. All of these are indications of a cold war turned hot.

Now, although it is unfortunate, I suppose we should have to expect this belligerent spirit to exist in a world of unregenerate people. But, among the Lord's people - the Church - where an atmosphere of love is supposed to pervade... we should hardly have to expect friction, strife, wrangling and fighting. Yet, James has to ask, "What is the cause of fighting among you?" (v. 1).

The Greek word used by James to describe the "fighting" [*Machoma*] among Christians, is an explosive term suggesting not a lingering spirit of antagonism but rather, an acute outburst, a sudden battle, a bitter contest for power. In other words, the text does not describe the prolonged "cold war," but a sudden hot war flare-up, such as may be quite common among church folk.

For instance, here is a church supper at which several of the ladies of the church are serving. There, at one end of the table, Mrs. Smith is serving her home-made potato salad. In the middle of the table, Mrs. Doe is dishing out the shredded carrots, coleslaw, raisins and celery salad she made. Now, the chairman of the board of deacons comes by and takes some of Mrs. Smith's potato salad but passes up Mrs. Doe's salad. Instantly, Mrs. Doe is indignant! "So, my salad isn't good enough for his lordship, eh?" And the war is on!

Ever so many little things like this can start fights among Christians, Two deacons may fight over who will serve the pastor communion. Two ushers at a wedding may battle over who will lead which parent down the aisle. Sunday school teachers may argue over who makes the most noise teaching a class in a crowded auditorium. All sorts of relatively insignificant issues can cause fightings among Christians, But James does not believe that this "fighting" is caused by many different factors. Basically, he reminds us, there is only one cause. *"Is it not your passions that are at war in your members? (v. 1b).*

The word "passions may be a bit too strong to describe what James had in mind, For the real cause of fighting among Christians is not passions, or lusts (KJV). But, once again, it is wanting your own way. When two or three people each want their own way, there is bound to be friction and strife. So, we can translate our text, *"is it not your personal, willful independence that wars among your members?"* Indeed, it is!

(2) HOW WAR STARTS

Well, now, we have seen, our text suggests that there are two kind of conflict: (1) war - open and unashamed, in the world at large; and (2) fighting - oftentimes hidden, but just as wrong among Christians. Further, James suggested that the cause for both sorts of warfare is precisely the same—selfishness or wanting your own way. When you stop to think about it, it is sad that the Christian should be so much like the world in this regard. We are supposed to live on a higher plane, and be governed by higher motives. Frequently, as we read in the newspapers, the ugly account of some psychopathic fiend who has attacked a great many women. we cry out in outraged disgust that he is no better than an animal. Well, in a very real sense, the Christian who fights and scraps constantly is no better than the world. He has left the lofty plane of holiness to live on the level of the carnal worldling. Now, our text goes on to describe how wars start.

Before we read verse two, let me point out, that if you would understand the pattern James has given at this point, you must alter the punctuation which the King James Version has in verse two. Remember, punctuation is not inspired. There was very little punctuation in the original manuscripts. All the words and sentences were usually run together in order to conserve space. So it is perfectly permissible to alter periods, commas, semicolons, etc., to help the text make more sense. Thus, we should read verse two as follows, *"You desire and do not have, so you kill. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and wage war."* As you read this verse, keep in mind the two groups James has been talking about, the world at large, and the Christian Church. For in verse two, he still retains the distinction. First, he describes how wars begin in the world at large. Then, he points out how fights begin in the Church. The sad fact is that there is virtually no difference.

Note the first description of war as it begins in the world at large. There are three steps: (1) you desire. (2) you do not have. (3) so you kill.

Consider any war fought in the world and you will see that, somewhere, buried in the artificial excuses given for the war, are these propositions: you desire, you do not have, so you kill.

The tragedy is that when James examined the motives back of the Christian Church battles, there is virtually no difference. The only difference lies in the outcome: (1) You covet, (2) you cannot obtain, (3) so you fight and wage war.

You see, the Christian's reason's for scrapping are no different from those of the world. Christians also covet. And when they discover they cannot get

what they want, they are willing to take extreme measures to gain their end. Of course, not as extreme as the world, for the world will kill to get its way. As a rule, Christians do not stoop to the taking of life; they are simply content to fight and wage war.

My friends, I am quite sure that James was a most unpopular fellow. For no one can expose the foibles and sins of people the way he has done and still retain his popularity. This may also be one of the reasons why this book is not used more by preachers. It is too merciless in ripping our masks of piety from our often very unlovely lives. However, when such a clear mirror of the soul is held up before us, we can do one of two things: (1) deny these insinuations outright, and refuse to even consider the possibility of truth in them; or (2) search our hearts, and better yet, ask the Lord to search us in the light of the psalmist's request, "*Search me, O God and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me. And lead me in the way everlasting*" (Psalm 139:23-24).

(3) HOW TO PREVENT WAR

The next part of our text discusses the way in which warfare can be prevented. We have just seen that warfare is the result of the spirit of covetousness, a selfish desire to possess something which does not belong to the person who desires, and an all-consuming determination to get what is wanted at any cost. Such a spirit can only end up in conflict, warfare, and killing. Obviously, therefore, in order to prevent such hostility, it is necessary to go to the source of the problem: the selfish desire itself.

For instance, here are two brothers, adolescent boys. They get along wonderfully together, hardly ever have any disagreements. But whenever the family gets ready to go to visit grandma, the one boy flies into a rage, without explanation. He balks at going, he yells, stamps on the floor, carries on tremendously, and no one knows why.

One day, the parents get to the heart of the problem. It seems that grandma favors the boy's brother and because he knows this, he hates to go to grandma. So, in the same way, James suggests that we must go back of the outbursts of anger and fighting that we see among Christians and find the cause. Look at the last part of verse two "You do not have because you do not ask. Now, there are some who believe that this part of the text applies only to asking God for things. But I suggest to you that here is the solution to warfare, and fighting - ideally that is, Let the opponents in battle examine their motives for fighting! In their selfish desire to have what they do not possess, they may have overlooked the expedients of common decency - that

of asking, negotiating, coming to terms around the conference table. *"You do not have because you do not ask"* (v. 2).

If there is still no satisfaction, even after asking or negotiation, it may well be that the opponents may be asking things which are improper, selfish and wrong. This is what verse 3 tells us, *"You ask and you do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your selfishness."* Now, of course, I am not so naive as to think that such a simple procedure will work with international disputes. This idealism has been seen in the philosophy of the Moral Rearmament Movement, but this simply does not work. For, there again, we are dealing with the diabolical selfishness of the unregenerate heart which will stoop to any levels to accomplish its desires.

But certainly, the Christian ought to be willing to examine his motives honestly. And if the Christian's relationship with other Christians are so strained that friction and warfare are inevitable, there is something sadly wrong between brothers in Christ. Such Christians are acting in exactly the same way as the unregenerate world. And this is a sad commentary on Christendom. For, all such Christians whose actions are, in every respect, like those of the world. James has some very harsh words in verse 1b,

"You unfaithful ones! Do you not know that a kinship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (v. 4)

To mimic the world, adopt its practices, be guided by its standards, is to be guilty of adultery. For, as Christians, we have been joined to Jesus Christ. Thus, to flirt with the world, which crucified Christ, is to become adulterers and adulteresses.

How sad is this picture, and how widespread. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul gave a similar description:

"For many, of whom I have often told you, and now tell you even with tears, live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction. Their god is their belly, they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things." (Phil. 3:18-19).

Oh, how each of us needs to recognize the truth of James 4:5-6,

"Or do you suppose it is in vain that the scripture says, 'He yearns jealously over the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us?' But, he gives more grace; therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'"

You see, God yearns over us with a loving spirit of holy jealousy. He longs that His redeemed ones shall live above the world on a high level of Christian holiness. St. Augustine, one of the greatest of the church fathers, said, "Lord, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our spirits will be restless, till they rest in Thee."

This is what God wants for you and me life fully yielded to Him. And, to help us achieve it, He gives daily grace to those who humbly wait on Him.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN
THE CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIP TOWARD
GOD, MAN AND THE DEVIL

James 4:7-12

"⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you men of double mind. ⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to dejection. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you. ¹¹ Do not speak evil against one another, brethren. He that speaks evil against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. ¹² There is one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you that you judge your neighbor?"

In my library, I have a book in which various writers express their views about important subjects. Recently, I had occasion to look up the word "life" in this book, to see what some of these authors thought of life. Just at random, I selected several of the definitions of life as given by different men: "Life is a college in which we earn our honors." "Life is a diary in which each of us writes his story." "Life is a cup of tea, The more heavily we drink, the sooner we reach the dregs." "Life is a galling load along a rough and weary road." "Life is a fragile dewdrop on its perilous way from a tree to a summit." "Life is a dream in the night."

Here are a number of descriptive phrases which seek to graphically portray life. But life is much more than these things. Perhaps we would not be wrong to say that life is a series of relationships. For, all through our earthly pathway we constantly enter into relationships with others, Some of these relationships are temporary - transient. Some are more permanent, And some are eternal. But, there cannot be any question of the fact that, each day of our lives, from morning till night, we share relationships with others: Family members, the bus driver, the traffic officer on the corner, fellow employees, salesmen, shopkeepers, the paper boy. And of course, there are those relationships which are more than human - our relationship to God, and the devil. So, I am calling our study, "The Christian's Relationship to God, Man and the Devil." The entire study can be easily summed up in three

commands : (1) Resist the devil. (2) Draw near to God. (3) Do not judge your fellowman.

I could stop right here, and you would have the heart of what I am going to say. However, for our purposes in this study, let me divide the text into two parts: (1) Resistance through submission (vv. 7-10); and (2) don't judge the brethren (vv. 11-12).

(1) RESISTANCE THROUGH SUBMISSION

Perhaps one of the most frequently asked questions is "How can I stand up against the devil's temptations when they come. Many times this verse is referred to as: "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." Actually, this is absurd! After all, what match are you for the Prince of Darkness himself. He has had centuries upon centuries of experience in outwitting people. How can you or I possibly expect to resist him and have him flee from us? Nonsense.

"Oh," says someone "the text says that when we resist the devil, he will flee from us. And besides, didn't Jesus resist the devil, and didn't he flee from Him?" Well, in the first place, you aren't Jesus! In the second place, Jesus did more than just resist Satan in that wilderness encounter. And in the third place, our text does not say that we ought to resist the devil and he will run away.

This is the sort of mistake that all too many Christians make in reading the Bible. And it is the reason why we become confused in our thinking about biblical truth. You see, we take half of a verse and build our beliefs on it... excluding the context. Verse 7 does not say "resist the devil and he will flee from you" for that simply is not true. What it does say is, "Submit yourselves to God." Then, you may resist the devil and he will flee from you. To do it any other way is to invite disaster. For the devil is not afraid of you. He can blow you over with a single breath. In your own strength, you are defenseless against the devil's wiles and cleverness. But, when you have submitted yourself to the Lord, His strength becomes yours, and in His strength you can go forward to conquer the evil one.

Never forget, even our Lord Jesus Christ Himself followed this procedure. He submitted Himself fully and completely to the Father's will, indicating this by His baptism of dedication. Immediately after this momentous occasion of submission, Jesus was driven by the Holy Spirit to the encounter with the devil. Because He was fully committed to His Father's will, He was able to successfully resist the devil, and the devil fled from Him. We too must be careful to put first things first. Submit to the Lord, and then resist the devil... and he will flee.

Just before moving along, let us take a quick look at the two words, "submit!" and "resist." Both words are military terms. To "submit" is to take your proper place in the ranks under God and to stay in line. You know, a company of soldiers marching in strict military disciplined cadence can be very impressive. During my service in the Army in World War II, I had an opportunity to march a group of 20 men across an Army base. It was the first, and only time, the Army let me do this. They never recovered from it. I had just been promoted to Corporal and when an officer wanted someone to march the men from one spot to another, he saw the corporal's chevrons on my arm and assumed I knew how to march men.

Well, we started off all right with everyone in beautiful formation, two abreast. But we had not gone more than 200 feet before the line was a mess. Ten minutes later, the line of marching soldiers stretched about the length of a city block. And when I arrived at the destination with the first two men, it took some 15 minutes for the other 18 to straggle in.

Well, the word "submit" means just the opposite of what I have just described. To submit ourselves to God is to take our proper places in line with God's will - and to stay put!

To "resist," on the other hand, is to line up all your resources against the devil and stand firm, without any thoughts of retreat. For the resources the Christian has at his disposal are the various pieces of armor listed in Ephesians six: the breastplate of righteousness, the equipment of the Gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit. With total submission to God and the use of these divinely appointed weapons, we may successfully resist the devil any time, and he will flee.

But, let's be very practical for a moment. Exactly what is involved in a submission to God? How do we bring ourselves into line with God's purposes and His plans, and then stay in His will? This is the subject that is dealt with next as we examine our relationship to the Lord.

"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands you sinners, and purify your hearts, you men of double mind. Let our laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to dejection. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you" (vv. 8-10).

In these verses, there are eight distinct commands which point the way to a better relationship with God. Let us see if we can gain a fuller appreciation of

what is involved. First, we are to "draw near to God." Now there is much more involved in such "drawing near" than a casual approach to ask God for something. For this "drawing near" has a definiteness and a finality about it that overrules any idea of coming near, and then going away. All too many Christians live their lives in a "hello, goodbye" manner. "Hello Lord; we're in fellowship today. "Goodbye Lord; we're going our own way tomorrow.

Don't misunderstand; I realize, as you do, that it is possible to get out of God's will occasionally. But some Christians make this habitual. James calls on us to "*draw near to God*" (v. 8) and he offers a beautiful reciprocal assurance in return: "*He (God) will draw near to you.*" The Lord desires us to come to Him just as we are, and to throw ourselves on His mercy. And the wonderful truth is that as we draw near to Him, He draws near to us.

Recall the beautiful story of the prodigal son. As the wayward young man came home to his father, filled with shame, doubts and anxiety, wondering if his father would take him back, even as a slave, the father drew near to his son, wept over him... and welcomed him back into the family circle.

This is the sort of God we have, to whom we may draw near. He is ready to draw near to us as well.

"Clean hands and a pure heart" (v. 8) are two other requirements for a proper relationship with God. This is a familiar Old Testament demand, for the psalmist asks, "*Who shall ascend to the hill of the Lord and who shall stand in his holy place?*" (Psalm 24:4a). And his answer is, "*He who has clean hands and a pure heart*" (Psalm 24:4b). This is a poetic way of saying, that it isn't only our open acts which count, but the motives of the heart which prompt those acts. For a person may do some very kind, generous things, but he may have a very unchristian, selfish motive back of them. The Christian who would really be in the center of God's will and in proper relationship with Him must have clean hands - that is, a life which is above reproach and open. And his inner thoughts, desires and motives must be pure and under the control of the Lord.

Quite possibly verses 9 and 10 may be unpopular from the modern point of view. Few of us like to "(be) *wretched, mourn and weep.*" Mighty few folk like to have their laughter turn to mourning and their joy to heaviness (v. 9). There was a time, not too many years ago, when sin and salvation were preached with such fervor and power, that sinners would literally cry over their sins. And Christians who would get out of the will of God would weep bitterly. But today, I suppose most of us are too sophisticated to cry about our sin. Perhaps Christians can sit in front of their television sets and cry their

hearts out over the soap operas. But they would consider it undignified to cry over such a thing as sin.

James calls on his fellow Christians to "be wretched," that is, miserable in attitude and heart. He calls on them to "mourn" - that is, in facial expression and manner. He insists that we "weep" - that is, give audible expression of sorrow. Again I say, this is not popular by today's standards.

But oh how spiritually profitable it is to shed some genuine tears over the way we treat our Lord. When we consider how much He has done for us, and the pitiful little we have done for Him. It ought to bring tears to our eyes. Modern psychiatry tries to get man to forget his "guilt feelings." But I say that it is a good thing now and then to remember how much pain our sin caused our Lord Jesus Christ. You see, although the Christian life is basically a life of joy, happiness and contentment, yet it is a far cry from a frivolous, inane, frothy, puerile existence. To be a Christian is to live the most serious, and yet most wonderful, life it is possible to live. Let not the Christian think that he can race through life giggling at this and snickering at that and chuckling at something else. Christianity is joyful, but not funny. It is filled with the greatest of happiness, but it isn't comical. When Jesus said that we shall have to give account of every idle word, He did not mean it is wrong to laugh at a good joke, or to tell one. But He did mean that we must guard against making all of life a huge joke. The true child of God will be humble before God (v. 10) and God Himself will exalt His humble servants in His own way and time.

(2) DON'T JUDGE THE BRETHREN

Finally, and very briefly, let us give some consideration to the danger of judging brethren. At this point, read verses 11 and 12. This text touches on the Christian's attitude towards his fellowman. And, in particular, it touches upon the Christian's relationship with his fellow Christian. For, in a sense, we are all brothers in creation by being children of Adam. But the Christian has further been made a member of the family of God by grace. Thus, in a special sense, we Christians look upon our fellow believers as "brethren."

In either case, however, we are not to speak evil, or to judge our fellows. Now, you know as well as I, that this is an easy habit to fall into, and a hard one to break. It is so natural to judge, criticize, denounce and condemn others. Anyone who does anything which does not please us, we censure and accuse, oftentimes without knowing all the facts.

Yet, if we are going to bring our lives into line with God's commands, this sort of thing must be ruled out. James tells us, in essence, that when we

denounce, accuse and judge others, we are denouncing and judging God's law. And, at least indirectly, we are judging God Himself. We are criticizing Him for not taking some action to overrule that which is obnoxious to us. Such a thought should make us take stock of ourselves.

Think of it! Every time we denounce or judge someone unjustly, without knowing all the facts, then in essence we are not only criticizing him or her, but we are finding fault with God who made man, for allowing him to act as he does, and not taking action to stop that which annoys us.

We need to realize anew what James has said, "There is one law-giver and judge, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another person?" (v. 12). St. Paul said something very similar to this in 1 Corinthians 4:5,

"Therefore, do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart."

He alone has the right to judge, criticize, accuse or condemn because only God can look down into the depths of man's heart to see why he has done what he has done. You and I judge others only by what is seen on the surface, and this can be most deceiving.

For example, you might see a fellow Christian coming out of a bar. Immediately, you would probably assume that he had gone in there to drink. So, without waiting to know all the facts, you automatically judge him and speak evilly against him. Actually, he may have had automobile trouble, and have gone into the bar to use the phone. In judging your brother in Christ, you are not only speaking against him. You are also speaking evil against the Christian Gospel he professes, and you are at least indirectly blaming God for not doing too good a job in saving the man.

Oh let us remember as James urges us to do in the closing section, that there is only one Judge: This Judge is able to save and to destroy. Surely, we can safely leave all judgment in His hands. This is what St. Paul had in mind when he wrote that beautiful chapter twelve to the Romans. We so often quote the first part about "presenting our bodies" to the Lord. But we sometimes forget that he ends up the chapter on quite a different note.

"Beloved, never take vengeance into your own hands," (Rom. 12: 19). Yet, this is exactly what we do when we judge or speak evil of others Instead of

this, Paul says, "Leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19-20).

In the light of this, we ask in closing this chapter, the same question James asks in our text (v. 12): "Who are you to judge your neighbor?"

Who, indeed? God is the Judge - and the justice He metes out is infinitely more penetrating than all you or I might do.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN
**HOW TO LIVE A "HERE TODAY,
GONE TOMORROW" WORLD**
GOD, MAN AND THE DEVIL

James 4:13-17

"¹³ Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and get gain"; ¹⁴ whereas you do not know about tomorrow. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and we shall do this or that." ¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."

One of the characteristics of human history has always been change. It is obvious to us today that we live in an era of change. Every day's newspaper brings fresh evidence that things are constantly being altered - sometimes for good, sometimes for evil. After all, there is nothing inherently evil in change. Unfortunately, all too many of us fear change. We are afraid to face a world in which the things we knew no longer exist. There is a certain psychological sense of insecurity which comes from seeing our old familiar landmarks or interests swept away with the ravages of time. Perhaps, at times, we may feel like the poet who said, "Change and decay in all around I see...."

We take out a snapshot album and look back over the collected pictures, Immediately, we notice pictures of friends and loved ones who are no longer with us. This is one of the inevitable results of the passing of time and change. Then, we compare the pictures of ourselves from several years back, with our present appearance. The change is obvious, and somewhat distressing. Yet, such change cannot be avoided, for, try as we will to stop it, time continues to march on. Still, where there is progress, there must also be change; Change in styles; speech; values; culture and knowledge.

For centuries, changes were relatively few. Years would go by with little or no alterations in the way people spoke, their cultural expressions, and their knowledge of the world about them. Then, all of a sudden, our modern scientific era came along. Now, it is virtually impossible to keep up with all the changes which take place. The world about us is changing so rapidly that scientific and historical books are out-of-date before they are six months old.

Logically, therefore, a question faces all of us: How shall we live in such a fast-moving age! How do we go about planning for the future in such a chaotic world? Something of this must have been in the back of Peter's mind when he wrote concerning the world about us which, to so many people, seems so solid, secure and permanent: "Seeing that all these things are going to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought we to be" (2 Peter 3:11). well, our text endeavors to come to grips with at least three factors involved in this matter. (1) The danger of presumption in making plans for the future; (2) The importance of being in God's will; (3) The peril of overstepping God's will.

(1) THE DANGER OF PRESUMPTION IN MAKING PLANS FOR THE FUTURE (vv. 13-14)

How often we make plans thoughtlessly, without stopping to consider all of the implications. For instance, most of the time, many people make their plans for their vacations some months in advance. Or, possibly you may be planning to visit a relative next week or next month. But the question arises, "How do you know that you will be going on vacation? How can you be sure that your visit to the relatives will come off? Have you taken into consideration all the things that might happen before your plans materialize? You might be sick. The vacation resort to which you had planned to go might be flooded or might burn down. Any one of hundreds of things might happen to prevent the carrying out of your well-laid plans.

The late Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse, some months before he faced the illness that eventually took his life, told about his engagement book being filled with speaking dates and travelling plans for a year in advance. Yet, he said: "I could dictate rapidly for an hour about events which might occur to cancel all these plans. The Lord might come, I might go to heaven by death, I might be alive but in a hospital somewhere, some parts of the country might become inaccessible due to atomic fall-out, etc. How true all of this is, we do not need to be told. And yet, we go right on making our plans without even considering the future possibilities which might thoroughly disrupt our intentions. It is this very thing that James brings to our attention in verse 13 and "Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and get gain." Whereas you do not know about tomorrow. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. "James had a tremendous insight into human nature. He had a thorough awareness of the way people act, often unthinkingly. And throughout his epistle, he constantly pointed out the inconsistencies and follies of things all of us do. So, in this matter of making plans for tomorrow in a changing, uncertain world, he issued a gentle, chiding remark which might be paraphrased as follows, "Oh, come on, now - you who

make specific plans for tomorrow! What do you know about tomorrow? How do you know you will be alive? After all, what is your life but a mist that appears for a while and then vanishes?"

Just in passing, let me call your attention to a little gem which does not find its way into the English translation. Apparently, James was alluding to something he had heard concerning the business dealings of his fellow Christians. The conversation he puts into their mouths shows this. Let me translate, more literally, verse 13. "Come on, now, you who say 'Today or tomorrow we will go into this city and stay there a year and exploit and make a haul....'" The word our translations render "trade" or "buy and sell" really means to exploit, to take advantage of. Perhaps we should not have to expect this sort of thing among Christians. That is, we should have reason to anticipate higher ethics from those who know the Lord. But, let's stop looking through rose-colored glasses: There are many Christians who are just as unscrupulous and unethical about business matters as the worst loan shark in the business. I would hate to tell you how many times businessmen have told me that some of their biggest credit risks were Christian church members. And I have been told on many occasions that Christian businessmen are not above passing off shoddy merchandise at "new" prices.

Quite probably, James had received word of similar dishonesty among Christians of his acquaintance. So, he selected a specific Greek word which warned against exploitations, thievery, cheating in commercial activities. I just mention this in passing, as an interesting sidelight. The main thought in our text, however, is "How can you plan your future activities when you can't predict the future?"

Of course, there is nothing any of us can do to offset or prevent future events from spoiling our well-laid plans. To quote the famous poet, Robert Burns, "The best laid schemes of mice and men, can often go awry."¹ Obviously, we cannot stop making plans because we know some of them will go awry. Like the Christian who refuses to plan for his future because he believes Christ's coming may be at any moment. Therefore, he figures, why spend money on a home, education, etc. When we know that Christ may come tomorrow and all that money and time will have been wasted"

Well, I believe in Christ's imminent return too! But I still plan for the future - even though I try to live day by day, We must certainly make our plans for the future as though Christ were not going to return for another 500 or more years, and yet at the same time, live day by day as if He might come back

¹ Burns, Robert, "To a Mouse," (1785)

tomorrow. If you ask how you do this sort of living, the answer is found in our text - verse 15.

(2) THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING IN GOD'S WILL (v. 15)

The fifteenth verse says, "You ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and we shall do this or that.'" Here, James tells us that our every action, intention and plan must be conditioned by God's will. Thus, we ought to say, "I'm going to the shore for my vacation, if God wills." Or, "I'll have enough money saved next year to retire, Lord willing." Perhaps, this sounds a bit too "pious" for most of us, and so we do not add the phrase, "if God wills." But, if we want to be truly Scriptural, the phrase will at least be in our thinking and planning, not as an escape mechanism, so that we can say, when things do not work out as we had hoped, "Oh well, I guess it wasn't God's will."

Rather, we Christians ought to desire all of our plans to be in accordance with the will of God. Actually, this isn't something peculiar to Christianity. Most religions have always had something akin to it. The ancient Greeks and Romans would often say, "If the gods will." The Moslems have a saying still in use today, "Insh 'allah," "if Allah wills." The two letters, D.V., have become familiar to us by their frequent use, and they mean the Latin "Deo Volente," God willing."

The true child of God will constantly seek to bring his ideas, thoughts, speech, actions, plans and hopes into conformity to the divine will. Now, how is this done? By a full commitment of our lives to Jesus Christ as our Lord. Frankly, we must tell the Lord that we definitely want Him to run our lives, that we desire His will to be done in us. Then, it is important to become thoroughly aware of God's will as is revealed in His Word, by saturating ourselves in this book. When some situation arises in your life in which you must make a choice or a decision, first ask yourself, "Does the Word of God have any command or principle which will tell me which choice to make?" If so, you have found God's will immediately.

For example, suppose you are figuring out your income tax and you are undecided whether to include an unauthorized deduction. Immediately, your mind should go to the principle set forth in the Ten Commandments, "Thou shalt not steal," and this should immediately give the answer to your dilemma. Unauthorized deductions on income tax blanks are actually stealing money which belongs to the government.

But, if there is no rule or principle governing your problem, then in serious, earnest prayer, simply tell the Lord of your desire to do His will, even before you know what His will is. Ask Him to put a block in your pathway to keep

you from following your own inclinations when they are contrary to His will. But, at the same time, ask Him to open up the way before you when you are heading in the right direction. You see, we must first determine in our hearts to follow God's will whatever it might be; then, God will take us at our word and reveal His will to us.

Airline pilots know what it is to follow the beam when they approach an airfield. There is a radio beam sent out by the control tower consisting of a steady note or hum. As long as the pilot is coming in "on the beam" the hum will be heard. However, if he should drift to the right or the left, the steady hum fades and a staccato "daaaa---dot; daaaa---dot" replaces it. This is an immediate warning to the pilot that he has gotten off the beam.

In a sense, the same thing is true when we submit to the control tower of God leading. As long as we stay on "the spiritual beam" the hum will be steady. But if we drift off center - the Holy Spirit will issue a sharp staccato warning, This is what the prophet Isaiah was talking about when he said, "Your ears shall hear a word behind you saying, 'This is the way, walk in it when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.'"

Finally, we want to briefly consider---

(3) THE PERIL OF OVERSTEPPING GOD'S WILL (vv. 16-17)

Unless we are constantly alert to the leading of the Holy Spirit, it is very easy to miss the will of God and move ahead in our own strength and wisdom. Particularly is this so when, as is so often the case, the pathway God indicates is most unattractive. Several years ago, I drove up to "Saddle-bag Lake Bible Conference" near Oneonta, New York. Before leaving Philadelphia, I had the automobile club to which I belong route out my trip on a map. At one point on the trip, there was a detour which was not marked on my map. The poorly-lettered sign on the roadside said "construction ahead, detour five miles. I looked at the detour road, and it looked terrible; full of ruts, and sharp rocks. Then I looked at the road supposedly under construction, and it looked beautiful - well-paved. Besides, several other cars were going on ahead using the "construction" road, while none were taking the detour. So, I deliberately disregarded the detour sign and followed the other cars down the nicely paved road.

It wasn't long before that nicely paved road became a dirt path, and a rock-infested, gutted wasteland. And for five long miles I drove through clouds of dust, over some of the deepest ruts I have ever seen. Later, I learned that the detour road I thought had looked so poor was actually a good road after the first quarter of a mile. This illustration taught me not to depend on

appearances, but to put more confidence in definite indications. So, in regard to the Lord's will, when He clearly indicates "this is the way; walk in it!" - all the deceptive circumstances in the world should not cause us to turn aside from God's clearly indicated will. To go our own way in the face of the clear leading of God is to be guilty of boasting in our arrogance (v. 16).

All such boastful, "I can do it better" attitudes, are evil. Summing it all up, James draws the lesson set forth in a proposition: "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."

If God makes very plain to us - either by His Word or some other clear indication - something He expects of us; and we - knowing what He wants - deliberately fail to do His will, this is sin! Oh! What serious business is this matter of being a Christian. We must be in such close contact with God that His slightest expressed wish becomes a command to us. And we must beware, lest by neglect or willful refusal, we fail to do His will and thus be guilty of sin. Let us bow humbly before Him and tell Him of our absolute willingness to do His will, whatever it might involve. Then let us back up our promise by a life of obedience.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN THE USE AND ABUSE OF WEALTH

James 5:1-6

"Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. ²Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. ³Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure^[a] for the last days. ⁴Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. ⁵You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. ⁶You have condemned, you have killed the righteous man; he does not resist you."

In this present study, we come to a rather difficult passage to expound to general readers. This is always true of texts which are specific as to the persons to whom they are addressed. Our text is such a one, for it is plainly directed to "you rich," as verse one indicates. Most preachers will steer away from such a portion of Scripture, usually for one of two reasons: (1) they do not want to offend any wealthy members in their churches; or (2) since the rich are usually in the minority in the church, the sermon will only touch a relatively few members. So, most preachers fail to touch on texts of this sort, or treat them lightly.

However, since we are studying the whole book of James, we cannot very well skip over a passage just because it may be unpopular. Besides, I am not at all convinced that these verses must only apply to the wealthy in this world's goods. Let us remember James 2:5, where James tells of God's blessing upon those who are poor with regard to this world, and yet rich in faith. You see, it is possible for even a pauper - without a cent to his name - to be rich; rich in faith towards God. There are many things in which we can be rich, totally apart from money. We may be rich in talents, cultural heritage, a Godly home of opportunities to serve Christ. So, while our text explicitly talks about the rich - and the dangers they face in judgment - indirectly, let us remember that whatever our riches, we shall be judged as to our use of them.

Incidentally, in passing, it might be worthy of mention that, all too often, we either give attention to - or ignore - Biblical portions, depending on whether

we think we are involved. This is true, not only in Biblical matters, but in life in general. For example, you pick up the Reader's Digest and read only those articles in which you think you will be interested. You scan the daily newspaper and perhaps read the sports, fashions, comics, headlines, or the radio-TV page - whichever of these things happen to concern you. So, also, in regard to Biblical matters. We read only those portions which seem to appeal to us; the things which flatter us and make us feel we're important. Other passages we overlook or disregard, since they do not touch on things we consider to be important.

To illustrate, we read "he that is spiritual," and we say, "that's us, and we go on to read the passage. Or, we read "let those of us who are mature" and we smile knowingly. "Oh yes; we are mature; this is for us." But, we come across a text that speaks of "liars"(1 John 4:20), "²⁰ *If any one says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.*", and we quickly shy away from it. "That doesn't mean me!" Or, we read a verse that tells us we're "false witnesses" (I Corinthians 15:15) or "blasphemers," and immediately we turn the other way.

This is what I mean when I say that texts which are specifically addressed to particular groups can be dangerous. Either people take them the wrong way, or those for whom they are intended... ignore them. Most ministers frequently find that the sermons they preach with certain delinquent members in their congregation in mind, are usually taken to heart by the wrong people - people who do not need that particular sermon at all. Thus, with our text, the rich who ought to give heed, ignore the text and simply say "Oh, that's just sour grapes. Some of the "have nots" are venting their grudges against the 'harvest.' Or, those who are not particularly rich in this world's goods say, "Oh, that verse belongs to the riche I'm not rich; it has nothing to say to me," and so they disregard it. In doing so, however, perhaps they will miss a great spiritual truth.

There is one other thought which must be mentioned. The Bible does not condemn wealth or the wealthy. Sometimes, the practice of the early church in sharing all their possessions in a sort of communal spirit is thought to be communism, or anti-capitalism. This is not so at all. If you re-read the last part of the book of Acts, chapter four and the first part of chapter five, you will see that the sharing was entirely voluntary - no compulsion in it at all. Those who had possessions could have kept these possessions. There was no obligation to give up their wealth to the Christian community. Certainly the Bible does not prohibit private ownership, or the possession of wealth. It is

the abuse of wealth that is spoken against. Thus, St. Paul, writing to Timothy said, *"The love of money is the root of all evils"* (I Tim. 6:10). This is clearly true: For the person who exalts wealth to an all-important status in life will soon find his wealth becoming an idol. To satisfy this idolatry, all manner of other sins become necessary.

There is one basic principle which we need to keep in mind, and which applies to both Christian and unconverted people alike: What God gives to man, is to be used wisely - not hoarded or wasted. The hideous practice which has taken place in the past in our great land of plowing under crops, throwing away gallons of milk, destroying excess food while there are starving people in the world, will not go unpunished. God does not prosper a people only to have them boast in multitudes are undernourished in the world. In our text in James, we find a picture of a wealthy man - typical of individuals and nations who have plenty. The man in our text is styled "rich." He has stored up his possessions for so long a time that his riches are rotted, his garments are moth-eaten, his gold and silver are tarnished - all through hoarding and lack of use. In short, he has been hoarding his wealth and possessions, "laying up treasure in the last days" (v. 3).

Meanwhile, as the rich wallow in their wealth, the poor suffer - even those who have worked for the wealthy. At this point, read verses four to six.

⁴ Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. ⁵ You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. ⁶ You have condemned, you have killed the righteous man; he does not resist you."

Now, this must not be looked upon as a denunciation of capitalism. James makes no plea for the sharing of all wealth. But he calls upon those who are employers to avoid hoarding and to consider their employees. Note in verse four, the phrase, *"the wages of the laborers cry out."* Observe, it is not the laborers who cry out but their wages. In this connection, we recall a similar reference in Genesis 4:10, where some inanimate object or factor cried out. After Cain had murdered his brother and buried him in the ground, God said to Cain, *"The voice of your brother's blood cries out."* Let us never lose sight of the fact that every injustice and evil perpetrated by man is known to God. Many times, God seems not to be interested in vindicating those who are oppressed. He seems to care little that man's inhumanity to man grows worse all the time. This seeming unconcern on the part of God has led many people to think that: (1) either God cares and is unable to do anything to stop the

injustice in the world; or, (2) God has the power to vindicate the oppressed, but He simply does not care .

Actually, neither of these possibilities is true, For God does notice every injustice, and He does have the power to act in judgment. But, purposely He is taking a laissez faire or "hands off" policy, allowing man to demonstrate the depths of his sinful nature. One day, God will bring every work into judgment At the final judgment throne, *"The books [will be] opened... and the dead [will be] judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done"* (Rev. 20:12). God keeps infinite records of all the wickedness of man - the diabolical deeds of dictators; the hideous crimes of depraved humanity, the dishonesty of employees against employers including stolen hours in unauthorized coffee breaks; the unfair practices of management. All are being recorded and will be brought to light at the final judgement to be evidence sufficient to condemn the unregenerate man forever. Do not think that the many injustices which we see about us go unnoticed. Verse four suggests that *"the cries of the oppressed reach the ears of the Lord of hosts."* He will take action in His own way and time. *"Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord"* (Rom. 12:19).

Obviously, this does not mean that Christians can just sit back and wait for God's judgment to straighten things out. The child of God must have a vital interest in social affairs; he must take his stand against all sorts of injustice. And, it must be understood that this is not the "modernistic social Gospel This is the Gospel!

But, when all the legitimate attempts to overrule iniquity, partiality, unkindness, and prejudice, have failed, there is the reassuring certainty that the Lord will not fail.

Now, let us give some consideration to the principles suggested by our text as they relate to us as Christians. We have already suggested that whatever God has given to man is to be used wisely - not hoarded or wasted. If this principle is true of the world at large, how much more is it true of the Christian! After all, the world's sense of moral obligation has been blunted by sin. Therefore, we cannot really expect the unconverted world to know what it is to use God's bounties wisely. But the Christian has been born again. He has become a partaker of the divine nature. He is given wisdom by the Holy Spirit. We thus expect the Christian to use what God has given him wisely.

But it is just here that we find our greatest disillusionment. For all too many Christians seem to forget their obligations to the Lord. In other words, many of us seem, apparently, to overlook the fact that we are stewards of that

which God has entrusted to us. All of our possessions, our talents, our time, our money, even the air we breathe - belong to the Lord. These blessings are only "on loan" to us. The hymn writer has captured something of this when he wrote:

"We give Thee but Thine own
What e're the gift may be
All that we have is Thine alone
A trust, O Lord, from Thee"¹

Shortly before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples a story which illustrates our responsibility to the Lord. It is recorded in Matthew 25:14-28. Briefly, this is the story. A wealthy man decided to take a trip to a distant land. Before leaving, he entrusted his property to his three stewards. As stewards, they were responsible for the proper handling of their employers possessions. They were expected to use these funds wisely, investing them to acquire more. Always, they knew that, when their employer returned, they would have to give a strict accounting of their use of his possessions.

Well, one of these men was entrusted with five talents - approximately \$5000. Another was given \$2000, and the third was given approximately \$1000. The first two men doubled their employers money by wise use and skillful investment. The third man buried what he had received; did nothing with it except hide it from sight. When the employer returned, he asked for an accounting. He praised the skillful stewards who had wisely used what had been entrusted to them. They were each rewarded. But the man who had done nothing with what his master had given him was severely judged for his indolence.

The moral of the story is plain to all who are alert. God entrusts to us - Christians and the Church - certain of His possessions. He expects us to use these possessions intelligently - wisely. Always we must remember that we shall have to give a strict accounting when the Lord returns. It is not ours to decide whether or not we want to be stewards of God. This is our responsibility once we have been born again. St. Paul put it this way, in 1 Corinthians 9:17: "*A stewardship is entrusted to me.*" Our only decision involves how faithful we will be as stewards, how wisely we will use the talents, time, money, intelligence, zeal, strength, health which God has given to use. Never forget the principle our Lord set forth, "*To whom much is given, of him shall much be required*" (Luke 12:48), The more God has entrusted to you, the greater will be the returns He expects on His investments. The sad fact is, as our text in James tells us, far too many Christians hoard their

¹ William Walsham How, "We Give Thee But Thine Own," (1858)

spiritual riches. Instead of bending every effort to be of service to Jesus Christ. We are so often satisfied with some halfhearted, mediocre effort.

James reminds us that the very superficiality of our efforts will be evidence against us at the Judgment Seat of Christ. For when we stand before the piercing gaze of our Lord, all the clever excuses for not giving the Lord our best will fall apart. When He asks us why we were so careless with our time and talents and money, like the steward with the one talent, all we can say to the Lord is, "Lord, I buried the possessions You wanted me to use for Your glory."

Oh what a need there is to re-examine our priority lists and to find out what things in our lives we really consider important. Then, let us take steps to put first in life what God considers most essential.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN THE ART OF BEING PATIENT

James 5:7-12

"⁷ Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until it receives the early and the late rain. ⁸ You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹ Do not grumble, brethren, against one another, that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the doors. ¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brethren, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ Behold, we call those happy who were steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

¹² But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath, but let your yes be yes and your no be no, that you may not fall under condemnation."

The subject of patience is a very practical one. Constantly, we are surrounded in life by all sorts of annoyances, irritations, unpleasant and unwanted situations. Things people say to us rub us the wrong way. There may be a clash of personalities, We argue over trivial or important issues. A series of relatively minor incidents build up to a climax - and one day we explode.

In a critical age such as ours when the world teeters on the edge of a precipice: business lingers between recession and prosperity, marriage and the home totter between stability and divorce, the crime rate soars to new heights, it is only natural that tension and friction underlie human relationships. It is in such an age that we need a greater understanding of true patience. The dictionary tells us that patience is the ability to endure trials without complaint. This is true in a general sort of way. But our text presses still further into the significance of patience.

If you read our text carefully, you will discover that the words, "patient" or "patience" appear four times in verses seven through eleven. "Be patient, brethren" (v. 7); "the husbandman [farmer] has long patience for the fruit" (v. 7); "be also patient yourselves" (v. 8); take the prophets as an example of patience (v. 10). All of the four uses of the word "patience" or "patient" translate one Greek word which has a very definite meaning. The word

suggests a man who is faced with a host of annoyances which plague him and almost cause him to "blow his top," Yet, he resolutely restrains himself, refusing to yield to the passion of anger or hatred, even though he would be perfectly justified. This man is said to have "patience And this is the sort of patience you and I are called on to have, as we face the obstacles of life.

In one of the question and answer periods which I conduct in connection with my Bible classes, a question was sent up to the pulpit asking what should be the reaction of a Christian young lady who is employed in a place where she faces a lot of nagging criticism. Should she just "take it" or should she answer back? What should be her position? Our text would seem to offer a suggestion as to the Christian's attitude in such a situation - or in all similar circumstances: "Be patient, brethren." While, inwardly, there is a strong incentive to lash back when someone offends us, the Christian who is led by the Holy Spirit acts with restraint, refusing to submit to the passion of anger. He remembers Proverbs 15:1 which says, "*a soft answer turns away wrath; but grievous words stir up [further] anger.*"

Now, in addition to the four uses of the word "patient" in our text - all translations of the same Greek word - the King James version offers a fifth use of "patience" in verse 11, where it says, "*you have heard of the patience of Job.*" However, as we shall see later in this study, this is an entirely different sort of patience. A different Greek word is used. Thus, the Revised Standard Version renders the term, not patience but "steadfastness." Perhaps I can show the difference by an illustration.

Here is a man and wife who have the man's aged father living with them in their home. Aged people become rather set in their ways and have a tendency to become cantankerous, cross, demanding and unreasonable. Now, the man and his wife do not have to put up with this unpleasantness. They can place the aged parent in a home for old folks. But they both decide that the elderly man will stay with them, and they will learn to be patient, restraining their annoyance and anger. This is an illustration of the word rightly translated "patient" in our text. A willingness to endure trials and dissension without complaint, because it is the right thing to do, even though there is an alternative. Clearly, a choice is involved here. However, the other Greek word which the King James Version renders "patience" and the RSV "steadfastness," can be illustrated as follows.

Some time ago one of the faithful workers in my Philadelphia office was taken sick with a bad cold. She simply couldn't shake it off and all medicines she took seemed not to help. Finally, she went to the doctor and, after a thorough examination, he committed her to a tuberculosis sanitorium. Now, clearly,

she had no choice in this matter. She had to go to the hospital. She must rest most of the time. She cannot do the things she would like to do. So the only thing she can do is to endure what the Lord has sent to her. Of course, in a sense there is a slight "choice" if you want to call it that. She can choose to be patient or impatient. This situation aptly describes the meaning of the word in verse 11 which the King James Version renders "patience" and the RSV, "steadfastness" in regard to Job.

So, our text calls on us, as Christians, to be patient. But the text also puts a time limit on our patience - *"until the coming of the Lord."* The great element of hope in the early Christian church was the promise of Christ's return. He who had been with them, He whom they had seen crucified, He who came back from the grave a victor over death - this very Lord and Savior had promised to return. Thus, in a very real sense, the early Church was built about that "blessed hope" of Christ's Second Advent.

Years, decades, then centuries went by and Christ still did not come back. Many Christians gave up hoping for His Second Advent. Others began to look upon the promises of Christ's coming as referring to (1) His coming to judge Jerusalem in 70 A.D. when the armies of Titus destroyed the city; (2) His coming to claim the believer at death; (3) His coming at a person's conversion; (4) His coming in the great events of history. In a sense, of course, we may think of these events as "comings of Christ. But none of them fully meets all of the Scriptural qualifications of the Second Coming of Christ. So, through the centuries, evangelical Christians have always held strongly to a literal return of Christ at the end of the age.

Here, James urges Christians to *"be patient until the coming of the Lord."* Once He comes, it will no longer be necessary to be patient. For, in the presence of Jesus Christ, all unpleasant, irritating, annoying factors which require patience will be gone. Recall the text in Matthew 13: in which our Lord said, "the Son of man will send His angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers. Now, while we Christians do not keep looking to a future life as a sort of escape mechanism--a "pie in the sky by and by" attitude - we nevertheless do know that all of the unpleasantness of life will be over for believers when our Lord comes, We do not seek to escape our share of the trials of life which belong to us as members of the human race here and now. Rather, the Christian faces the irritations of each day with patience, refusing to yield to the urge to "get even" for he knows that *"the coming of the Lord draws near."*

Naturally, no one knows the day nor the hour of Christ 's return. But, if His coming was near at hand in biblical times, how much more must it be near

today, 2000 years later? So, when you look about you and see so much injustice and corruption; when you are tempted to say, "What's the use of trying to live a godly life? See how the ungodly prosper." - just be patient: The Lord is coming, and when He does, all the injustice and sin will be dealt with. Remember! All the hell a Christian gets, he gets in this life; then, heaven. But all the heaven the unregenerate get, they get in this life; then - hell.

At this point, James offers a pertinent illustration of the principle of patience in the person of the farmer.

"Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until he receives the early and the late rain" (v. 7b).

Perhaps this "early" and "late rain idea means little to most of us. But, in Biblical times, the farmer depended largely on the seasonal rainfall for his planting and harvesting. There was little irrigation of any sort in those days. The farmer simply had to be patient. What else could he be? The "early rain" came in late October or early November. This rainfall served to loosen the dry, hardened, cracked, parched ground, so that planting might begin.

Then, in late April and May, the "late rains" came. These were light showers needed for the final maturing of the grain. Now, when James says that the farmer "waits " for the precious fruit, the word "waits" suggests that he had every reason to expect fruit and so he anticipated it with confidence. His expectation of harvest was based on: (1) the traditions of farming passed on to him by his father, grandfather, great-grandfather, etc.; (2) his personal experience of other years, so, James says, as the farmer is patient in waiting for the early and late rains, expecting the harvest, so must we Christians be patient until the coming of the Lord, fully expecting Him to come as He promised. Our expectation is based on: (1) His promise; (2) the confirmation of Scripture; (3) the testimony of the Church; (4) our inner conviction sent by the Holy Spirit.

The farmer often receives setbacks in his patient waiting for the harvest. The rains may be late, or inadequate. A cold spell may set in unexpectedly. Yet, he is patient through it all until the harvest comes. So, in our Christian lives, there are setbacks from time to time that test our patience. But, says James, "establish your hearts" (v. 8).

Interestingly, the word "establish" means to "prop up" what might otherwise sag or cave in. So, when the unpleasantness of life assails the child of God, let him prop up his heart, *"for the coming of the Lord is at hand."*

The next verse can easily be misunderstood and the full point missed entirely. For the King James Version says, *"grudge not one against the other."* What does it mean, to "grudge not?" The RSV doesn't help much by saying *"do not grumble against one another."* The New English Bible has come closer to the true meaning when it says, *"do not blame your troubles on one another."* For the Greek word translated "grumble (RSV) is a word which means to groan inwardly, often in a state of dissatisfaction with the present conditions. Now, understand: It is perfectly logical and satisfactory to be dissatisfied with present circumstances, at times. But we have no right to blame others for our predicament, when it isn't their fault. Whenever we point an accusing finger at others, for anything, we have to be willing to stand under the same type of judgment ourselves. Otherwise, we have no right to judge. Recall what Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount?

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or, how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."
(Matthew 7:1-5).

In the same light, our text in James cautions against *"grumbling"* or *"blaming our troubles on one another,"* lest we be judged similarly ourselves. Remember, he says, *"the Judge is standing at the door"* (v. 9).

I wonder how much of our criticism of others would cease if, before we judge someone else, we apply the same type of judgment to ourselves? But again, to avoid criticizing others, we must seek to possess the patience our text talks about. Sometimes, patience comes only as the result of experiencing the hard knocks of life. St. Paul once said in his letter to the Romans, *"suffering produces patience"* (Romans 5:3).

The second illustration of patience at work, is given to us in verses ten and eleven, The lot of a spokesman for God - and that is the true meaning of the word "prophet" - is not that of a predictor of the future, for that is a relatively minor and unimportant phase of his work. Rather, a prophet is one who

speaks forth for God, cost what it may. The lot of such a prophetic messenger of God has never been easy or pleasant. Sometimes we are misled by the apparent glamour on the surface. The prophet has access to kings, presidents, great leaders. He often receives the plaudits of the crowd when what he says pleases them. For example, many people envy the minister who stands before huge crowds and has them eating out of his hand by his silver-tongued oratory. But the crowds fail to see the dark side of the prophet's work. They do not see his turmoil of mind as God gives him a message difficult to deliver. They do not recognize his fearful concern that, what he says will be taken in the right way. They do not comprehend his necessity to contend with the ugliness of his enemies. Believe me The spokesman for God who is true to his mission, has no easy time. There is, as verse ten of our text says, much suffering and patience, borne in the time of the Lord. Never forget that when the child of God takes his stand with the Lord, he becomes an immediate target for all who hate Jesus Christ and what He stands for... including the devil and, his agents - human and demonic. The Christian can expect suffering, misunderstanding, trial, and derision. After all, can the Lord's spokesman expect anything better than his Master received?

James reminds us of the trials Job received at the hands of the devil. Through all of his sufferings, Job was by no means, "patient." He was one of the most impatient creatures alive. Thus, the King James Version is wrong when it says "*the patience*" of Job (v. 11). He was impatient. But, through all of his murmurings of dissent, he was still "steadfast:" that is, he never relinquished his trust in God. He said, "*though he slay me, yet will I trust him.*"

And, in verse eleven, in the story of Job, we see the ultimate purpose of God - His compassion and His mercy. The writer of the book of Hebrews comments on the prophetic spokesmen of God (see *Heb. 11:32-38*).

32 And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. 35 Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life. 36 Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated— 38 of whom the world was not worthy—wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth."

How true that the world is not worthy of these stalwarts of the faith. But the very life of the child of God in the world can, through his patience and steadfastness, become a testimony to God's faithfulness, compassion and mercy. For our God is with us in all of the experiences of life. The true Christian knows that, even through the dark valleys of life, he can be happy as he walks steadfastly with the Lord (v. 11). This is because the Christian knows, in advance, the ultimate purpose of God to bring His people through to a joyful and eternal victory. The Apostle Paul put it this way:

"We know that, in everything, God works for good with those who love him, who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

This is your promise from God! Hold on to it, and claim it! It is God's guarantee of patience for you all the way through life.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN TO SWEAR OR NOT TO SWEAR

James 5:12

"¹² But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath, but let your yes be yes and your no be no, that you may not fall under condemnation."

The subject of swearing has been a controversial one for a long time. Therefore, right at the start, a word of explanation is in order. For, to most of us, "swearing" means using blasphemous language. Thus, if we hear someone using the word "damn" or "hell," we generally say that he is swearing. But, technically speaking, this is not swearing; at least, not in the sense in which the Bible speaks of it.

You see, we often fail to make a distinction between swearing, profanity and obscenity. The word "profane" comes to us from the Latin *pro*, meaning "in front of;" and *fanum*, meaning "temple." So, anything "profane" was something which was improper inside the temple, and could only be spoken or practiced "in front of" or outside the temple. "Profanity," therefore, is language which is unsuited for the temple or the church. Into this category the "damns" hells and all similar epithets fall. Such speech is profane and we call it profanity. But it is not swearing in the Biblical sense of that term.

Incidentally, in this regard, we might say a few words about the third commandment, *"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain."* Sometimes, we are inclined to think that this is a warning against using God's name in profane speech. Thus, when we hear someone carelessly asking God to damn someone, perhaps we cringe a bit and feel like warning him that he is breaking the third commandment. However, this is not so at all. For the third commandment has nothing particularly to do with profane speech. To *"take the name of the Lord in vain,"* means more than adding God's name to a series of "damns." To take the name of the Lord in vain means that we profess to follow Him, and yet by our lives we deny this discipleship.

Or, to take an illustration, here is a woman who marries a man with a good name and reputation. She bears his name through marriage. Then, after they are married, she begins to go out with other men without her husband's knowledge. Soon, word of her promiscuity gets around. She has cast a blemish on her husband's reputation. She has taken his name, but she has taken it "in vain."

Or, here 's a young man who has always been the pride and joy of his parents. One day, he gets into bad company and goes from bad to worse. Soon, he is wallowing in sin and crime. He has borne his father's name, but he has taken it in vain. This is what the third commandment means by "taking the Lord's name in vain." Not profanity as such, but claiming to be Christians, bearing the name of Christ in the title "CHRIST-ian - and yet failing to live up to the high calling. This is "taking God's name in vain" by a false life.

There is another term we toss about carelessly, and frequently confuse it with "swearing," just as confuse "profanity" with swearing. This term is obscenity. As all of us are aware, this word has increased in use in recent years. It comes from a Latin term meaning filthy, foul or disgusting.

The sort of things Hollywood puts out in abundance dealing with lewd perversions of sex, can be styled "obscene." Further, much of the newsstand filth is obscene. A good portion of the contemporary novels can be classed under the title "obscene." Clearly, however, we must make a distinction between profanity, obscenity and swearing. For profanity and obscenity are rarely practiced within the church; at least, they should not be: Whereas, swearing is quite acceptable in and outside the church, as we shall see.

Now, returning to our text in James 5:12, notice particularly what James said about swearing.

"Above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath, but let your yes be yes and your no be no, that you may not fall under condemnation."

Perhaps you recall that our Lord said very much the same thing, and unquestionably James had an allusion to this utterance. For Jesus once said:

"³⁴ But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil." (Matthew 5:34-37).

In the light of these two texts - the one in James 5; the other in Matthew 5 - it is obvious that swearing does not mean profanity in the biblical text. Rather, when the Bible speaks of swearing, it refers to the taking of an oath calling God to witness something that you do or say.

In fact, the Greek word that is translated "swear" in the text means to take an oath. When Peter stood in the courtyard of the high priest's home while Jesus was on trial, someone spotted him and said, "certainly you are also one of the [disciples]; your accent betrays you." Peter was terrified. Thus, we are told that he took an oath, calling God to witness and saying, "I do not know the man!" (Matthew 26:74). Unfortunately, the King James Version suggests that Peter began to curse and swear, and we generally think of this in terms of profanity. But this is not the meaning of the text at all. Peter simply took an oath, calling God to witness what he was saying. When we recognize this, we can understand the awful solemnity of the act Peter performed in thus denying his Lord by means of an oath taken in the name of God.

Or, recall when the daughter of Herodias danced before Herod. Herod took an oath and vowed to give her whatever she asked (Mark 6:23). In both these cases, the same Greek word is used to describe the oath as that which appears in our text (v. 12).

Now, it must be realized that there are times when the taking of an oath is perfectly legitimate and acceptable. After all, the Bible teaches us that God took an oath; Jesus took an oath; St. Paul took an oath. Several times in the book of Hebrews, we read of God's determination not to let the disobedient Children of Israel see the Promised Land. He said, "I swore [took an oath] in my wrath, saying, "They shall never enter my rest (Hebrews 3:11; 4:3). In the same book, we read that when God wanted to let Abraham know of the blessing He intended to bring upon him. He "swore by Himself." He took an oath on His own name - since there was none greater (Hebrews 6: 13). When Jesus stood before the high priest at His trial, He was silent. To all the false charges raised against Him, He answered nothing. But, when the high priest said, "I adjure you by the living God to tell us whether you are the Christ of God", Jesus had to respond.

For the High Priest was asking Jesus to take an oath on whether He was God's Son. This is the meaning of the word "adjure" to take a solemn oath. For Christ to have refused to answer at this point would have been for Him to deny His deity. Therefore, Jesus took the oath and affirmed His deity, thus giving the High Priest the very evidence against Jesus he was seeking.

St. Paul also took an oath. In 2 Corinthians 1:23, he told the Christians at Corinth, "*I call God to witness against me, that it was to spare you that I refrained from coming to Corinth.*" You see, the Corinthians had begun to think that Paul considered himself "too big" to come to them; that he was content to send some of his associates. Yet, in his second epistle, Paul took an oath in his statement as to why he refrained from coming to them.

From these illustrations, we can see that oaths may very much be in order at times, when the seriousness of a situation warrants such swearing. For example, if you are called to the witness stand in a court case to testify as a witness for either the prosecution or the defense, you may feel perfectly free to take an oath that you will tell the truth. Granted, some courts permit witnesses to "affirm" rather than "swear" for the benefit of those who have religious scruples against swearing. But, if God, and our Lord Jesus Christ, and St. Paul could take oaths, surely there is nothing wrong with the practice for us provided it is not abused.

However, it is thoughtless, careless, indifferent attitudes which our text would speak against. The person who, in order to prove some point he has made, says, "I swear to God this is so!" Or, the unthinking individual who makes some apparently unbelievable statement, and adds, "So help me, that's right! God strike me dead if it isn't. This is the sort of "swearing" which is sinful. Similarly, the oath-taking of Herod and Peter which we have just mentioned was sinful, for it was done without a consideration of all of the facts.

You see, when anyone takes an oath, it is a solemn promise to perform that which is intended. If I swear to tell the truth in a courtroom, I must do just that. It means I have weighed the consequences and all of the factors involved, and I promise to tell what I know.

In the light of this meaning, how could Herod have promised, under oath, to give Herodias' daughter anything she wanted? And how could Peter have taken an oath saying he did not know Jesus, when he was one of His chief disciples?

Do you recall the story of Pandora, from Greek mythology? This woman was given an important box or container which she was forbidden to open. Of course, being curious, Pandora took just a little peek inside. However, as soon as the box was opened, all of the evils that now afflict man emerged. Pandora learned, too late, the tragedy of disobedience. Now basically, this was the Greek's way of explaining the fall of man and the consequent host of problems that have surrounded humanity. For, in the Biblical record, we find that Adam faced a glorious future, free from sickness, disease and pain – if only the "Pandora's box" of evil had not been opened when he and his wife yielded to temptation. The mind of man as he came from the creative hand of God was fresh and fertile, suitable for the revelation of all divine wisdom and truth. Adam and his descendants would have produced the intelligence of an Albert Einstein long before the 20th century, if he had not dabbled into sin.

Yet, all of this latent, dormant health of body and mind and spirit was forfeited the instant Adam disobeyed God. In its place, man began to grovel about in the degenerate regions of sensual ignorance and spiritual darkness, subject to physical, mental and moral sickness and death. And, basically, this is still man's condition and domain, even though thousands of years of supposed enlightenment have slipped by. So, while it can be said that God did want everyone to be healthy at one time, that state of health was nullified, canceled and forfeited by the entrance of sin. And today, man cannot be fully healthy because he is still subject to the ravages of the old Adamic nature. Even the Christian, who has the divine nature implanted within him when he is born again, may face sickness and pain.

Our Pentecostal brethren tell us that healing is in the atonement; that, when Christ suffered on the cross and died for our sins, He also "bore our infirmities and sicknesses. Therefore, a Christian has the right to claim bodily healing as well as salvation since healing is in the atonement - I agree with this completely: healing of the body is included in the atonement. But, so is the resurrection of the body; the second coming of Christ; our heavenly home; and the earthly reign of Jesus Christ. All of these - and more - were won, gained and purchased for us by Christ at Calvary. We cannot even begin to fathom all that Christ gained for us by His atonement. However, most of the things gained for us by the atonement of Jesus Christ are not now available to us, and will not be until we are with Christ in His Kingdom.

In a sense, this is something like a wealthy person's will. In his will, he leaves a large portion of his fortune to his son. But there is a stipulation. The fortune is put into a trust fund for the boy - until he becomes a mature adult. Now and then, he may draw on that fund slightly - but only very slightly, and only for emergency reasons. The whole bulk of the fund is not his until he reaches a specified mature age. Now, in much the same way, God has made available all the riches of His grace through Christ's death. Life everlasting, heaven, the second coming of Christ, the earthly reign of Christ, the resurrection, healing of the body, etc. All are written into Christ's last will and testament. But this does not mean that all these delightful benefits are ours now. There is a stipulating clause which tells us that we shall have these benefits only when we reach our mature state of Christian perfection and adulthood.

So, complete bodily healing is the portion of every Christian, because of the atonement of Jesus Christ. The drying of the tears of the afflicted; the relief of the pain of the suffering; the opening of the eyes of the blind; the unstopping of the ears of the deaf; the cure of the mentally afflicted. As Christians, we have a perfect right to claim deliverance from all these ailments, with one provision: the deliverance must come in God's own time

- not ours: Just because we think certain things should be done when we want them, it does not follow that God always feels that way too. If God sees fit to allow His people to suffer every day of their lives, in intense pain, bitter affliction, this is His business and He unquestionably has a reason for it. It is not our place to accuse Him of being unkind, unjust, ruthless.

Never forget what the Apostle Paul said: "The sufferings of this present time are not even worthy to be considered in the light of the glory of eternity which shall one day be ours" (Romans 8:18). After all, if you and I could stand even for five minutes on the shores of heaven and look back at this life, all the trials and sufferings and pain and seeming tragedy would suddenly become reasonable, because we would be seeking these things from the standpoint of eternity. When we see things from God's point of view, they make sense. When we see those same things with our limited vision, they seem to be horrible blunders of nature. Surely, God has a reason for allowing His people to be sick, even though they would rather be well.

St. Paul, the greatest of apostolic men of faith, suffered most of his life from what he called "a thorn in the flesh." No one is sure what this "thorn" actually was. Was it blindness or near blindness? Was it some fever he had picked up in the low areas of Asia Minor? We cannot tell. But, three times Paul asked God to take this "thorn" away; to heal him. And God refused! Was God being harsh? Cruel? Unkind? Not at all. He gave the Apostle Paul sufficient grace to bear the infirmity for his life time. Thus, Paul could say "Most gladly will I glory in my infirmity that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (11 Corinthians 12: 9).

Timothy, Paul's younger protege, had a chronic stomach disorder caused by the horrible water supply of the day. Yet, did Paul heal one of his closest associates? He did not: Instead, he prescribed some wine to be taken medicinally as a corrective. What about Trophimus, whom Paul left sick at Miletus? (2 Timothy 4:20) Or Epaphroditus, who nearly died of his ailment (Philippians 2:27)? Why didn't God use Paul to heal them instantly, instead of allowing their illnesses to progress to dangerous extremes? The answer simply is that it was His will for them to remain sick.

For that matter, why didn't Jesus heal everyone during His ministry on earth! You recall the miniature hospital ward full of sick people at the pool of Bethesda. Yet, Jesus ignored all the rest and only healed one man. Obviously, His will was that the others remain sick. What other conclusion can we draw?

We conclude therefore that God's original plan called for man to be healthy - if he were obedient. But man forfeited this privilege by disobedience, and became subject to the ailments of every description. This policy will continue until the Kingdom of God comes in all of its fullness and Jesus Christ the King reigns in perfect righteousness. Then, healing of the body, mind and spirit will be the possession of all of His subjects.

Well, now - if we acknowledge that God does tolerate affliction and pain in His people, let us ask one more question: Does He have a reason for the afflictions of Christians - His own redeemed ones? We might assume that sickness comes to the unsaved as a judgment for their sin. Though, this is not always the case. But why should Christians suffer - especially when they have committed their lives to Jesus Christ? Even though it is extremely difficult at times for someone, held in the grip of suffering, to understand how God could possibly allow such unpleasantness to exist, we must remember again that we do not see things as He does. His thoughts are higher than ours; our ways are not His ways, In eternity, with all our human aches, pains, sufferings and trials behind us, we shall realize that those sufferings were nothing, compared to the endless ages of unclouded joy which shall be ours. You see, we are not creatures of time alone. We belong to the eternal realms and are just pilgrims, traveling through this life.

One of the most beautiful verses in all the Bible we overlook or misunderstand because of a poor translation. In Ecclesiastes 3:11, as correctly rendered by the Revised Standard Version, we read, [*God*] *has made everything beautiful in its time; also, he has put eternity into man's mind.*" You see, it is only when you and I come to realize the reality of eternity, written into the very fabric of our being, that we can fully face the complexity of life here and now. If God has given you good health, physically and mentally, consider it a trust from Him, to be invested in His Kingdom, not squandered on self. But if God has entrusted you with pain, remember that suffering is just as much of a trust as health. God may be using adversity to fashion you into one of the great masterpieces of His grace. He knows that you can be trusted with far more affliction than some of us who are free from suffering. In spite of how difficult it sounds, thank Him for this painful token of His grace, and recall the words of St. Paul to the Philippians - *"for it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in him but also willing to suffer for his sake"* (Philemon 1:29). He will always furnish the daily strength and grace to see you through the ordeal. As you face each new day of affliction, remember two verses: *"God is faithful and will not let you be tested beyond your endurance"* (I Corinthians 10:13), and *"Blessed is he who endures trial, for having stood the test, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to them who love him"* (James 1:12).

An oath can only be taken concerning things or circumstances over which we have control or full knowledge. This is why Jesus said, "*Do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.*" (Matthew 5:36). Of course, this was spoken in the days before Miss Clairol and other hair rinses which can change a person's hair color to just about any shade. The text goes on to say, "Let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no' that you may not fall under condemnation" (v. 12). There is an old saying that, "A man's word is as good as his bond." As for the Christian, a Christian's word should be every bit as good as any oath he might ever take. That is, it should never be necessary for any man to have to take an oath. Certainly, not a Christian! Man was created in the image of God, and should be honest and trustworthy. However, the entrance of sin changed all that. Man is a sinner, and a part of that sin involves a lack of trust or confidence in his fellowman. Indeed, the very fact that we need oaths taken in our court illustrates the depths to which our civilization has fallen. For, if everyone told the truth, no oath would be needed in court cases. The oath in contemporary society is an indictment and a condemnation of what we humans have become.

I wonder if we realize that honesty is largely a thing of the past in all too many realms. For example, take advertising. There are so many false claims made by advertisers that the consumer does not know what to believe. On any one evening, the claims made on the television commercials will claim that half a dozen washday products are all the best, and will do the most. Three or four different deodorants will be said to be the finest. Several different gasolines will be presented as without equal. In the light of this type of advertising, what are potential buyers to believe?

Or, consider the news in our newspapers, on the radio and the television. The public has good reason to wonder how much straight news is being received, or how much is being withheld, suppressed or slanted in a specific direction. And, of course, we are all familiar with the grossly exaggerated claims of politicians running for office. Further, we know of the crookedness in labor unions, some of the unethical practices of management, the bribes that are taken by our local police officers, the dishonesty in the dealings of international diplomats, etc. Indeed, if we are honest with ourselves, we will acknowledge that our personal relations with each other, as neighbors, friends, relatives and business acquaintances are filled with deceit, pretense and hypocrisy. When we see these widespread examples of dishonesty, perhaps we can better understand why the oath is essential.

Yet, even the existence of the oath - the requirement of "swearing" - does not meet the need. For it is ridiculous to ask a person to take an oath, calling God to witness, when to a large percentage of people God means very little.

Perjury - the telling of a lie while under oath - is a serious offence, punishable by severe penalties. But, we must never forget that God has even greater penalties for the perjurer: *"All liars shall have their part in the lake of fire"* (Revelation 21:8).

In a world where the very existence of the oath is a testimony to the sinfulness of man, we Christians have a serious responsibility. We must so live our lives in a Godly manner that even the ungodly shall know that we are men and women of our word, who can be depended upon. Let it be constantly true that, when we say "Yes," it means "Yes." And when we say this too, can be depended upon. We need not hesitate to take an oath and to swear to some truth. But we must avoid the careless, unwarranted use of such swearing since this is far too serious a matter to trifle with lightly. However, the closer we live our lives to Jesus Christ, the less people will question our statements, and the more they will be willing to take our word, even without an oath.

One last thing. The well-known Greek tragic poet of the sixth century B.C., Aeschylus, once said: *is not the oath that makes us believe the man, but the man, the oath*" If our lives consistently measure up to our profession and our claim as Christians, others will gladly put their trust in what we say and what we do. They will not require extra assurances, oaths, swearing, etc. But they will take us at our word, since they will see God 's Word at work in us

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN THE CHURCH AND HEALING

James 5:13-16

"¹³ Is any one among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise. ¹⁴ Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; ¹⁵ and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects."

With this chapter, we come to a most controversial section of the epistle of James because it touches an area of life about which most of us are very sensitive - that is, the condition of our health; the prevention of death; and escape from pain. Because these realms of our living are so important to us, we tend to react emotionally whenever anyone, or anything seems to threaten them in any way. Thus, it is rather difficult to get people to think dispassionately and rationally about something in which they are emotionally concerned.

For example, we see this principle at work in everyday life. Here is a mob in a small town which has become convinced that a man is guilty of a crime. They decide to take the law into their own hands and beat him within an inch of his life. Suddenly, as the crowd is preparing for its ugly actions, someone in the disturbed, angry group shouts, "lynch him!" The others soon take up the strain until the entire mob is clamoring for blood. Clear thinking and common sense are thrown to the winds in such an instance.

During the régime of Adolf Hitler, we had a similar illustration of great numbers of people being emotionally involved in the situation, and calm, sensible discussion was out of the question. Hitler shrieked his militant speeches, stirred people into a frenzy and they all shouted, and they followed him like little puppy dogs.

The same abandonment of reason to emotions takes place when two young people fall in love. It is virtually impossible to talk rationally to them, or to get them to think through the implications of their step. They are too emotionally involved. Or, in the realm of Scripture, see how a small group of rabble-rousers have made a series of wild claims about the RSV and its

translators "They rob Christ of His deity!" "They've omitted the blood! "They're communists and modernists! They've done away with the virgin birth! And because evangelical Christians are bound up emotionally with these basic, important, fundamental concepts, many people, unthinkingly, condemned the RSV sight unseen, without taking the time to see if these things are so. The same rabble-rousers, at this writing, are engaged in damning the New English Bible as well.

In the same way, as we come to a discussion of James 5:13-16, the subject of the Church's place in the matter of healing - I know some of the things I will say will rub some of our readers the wrong way. This is inevitable. For, readers of this book will be representatives of many churches, and no matter what I might say about this controversial theme, it will be the wrong thing for some readers, since as I have suggested, many of us are emotionally involved where sickness, healing, anointing with oil, praying for the sick, etc., are concerned.

Therefore, I believe that before I actually get to the text in James, it might be wise to give several background lectures on the general theme of the Church's place in the program of healing. I do not ask that you agree with me in what I am going to say; you may or you may not. But I only ask that you put aside your personal prejudices and be willing to consider the facts. That is, do not close your mind to this issue before at least reading what I have to say. In this way, we can either agree, or agree to disagree and still remain good brothers and sisters in Christ.

In our modern times, perhaps as never before, there is a new trend within Christendom to re-evaluate the whole question of "divine healing." In 1953, the Anglican Church in England appointed a 28-man commission of clergymen and medical specialists to study the theological, medical, psychological and pastoral aspects of healing. In 1959, the commission's report was made public. The conclusion reached was that religion can offer a great deal of faith and hope to a sufferer, and these qualities materially assist in a person's recovery from an illness. Yet, except for the rare miracle, religion is no substitute for pills and surgery.

Now, in spite of this rather negative-seeming attitude towards spiritual healing, there are increasing numbers of people who feel that, when the Church avoids all sorts of healing programs, the Church is "missing the boat" in its ministry to humanity. Perhaps it might be beneficial for us to give some thought, first of all, to our Lord's own ministry of healing. Since He is the Lord of the Church, and any petitions for healing - as well as any anointing

with oils - must be performed in His name, it might be good for us to rethink Christ's healing work while He was on the earth.

In all of the three and a half years of Jesus ministry, we have a record of some 32 or 33 miracles of healing, either physical or mental. Taken as a whole, these cases can be divided into four categories.

(1) SICKNESSES AND ILLNESSES OF A PHYSICAL NATURE

These would be fevers, palsy, congenital blindness, deafness, speech disorders, leprosy, lameness, arthritic curvature of the spine, paralysis, severed ear, hemorrhage, epilepsy (where caused by physical damage to the brain).

(2) PSYCHOGENIC AILMENTS

These would be the real physical ailments, caused by mental or psychological factors. For example, it is quite conceivable that some of the cases of blindness or paralysis which Jesus healed may have been "hysterical" in nature. That is, they may have been caused by a mental block of some sort or an emotional disturbance. Once the block was removed by the Lord, the illness correspondingly vanished.

(3) NEUROTICS AND PSYCHOTICS

Unquestionably, some of Jesus' patients were neurotic or psychotic. This means that they had, in some measure, broken with reality and gone off into a world of their own in fantasy. Personally, I believe that many, not all, of these cases in Biblical times may have been under the influence of demonic powers. Thus, to heal them, Jesus had to first "cast out the demon" and then apply the soothing balm of His healing touch.

(4) Demon possession

We must not forget that demon possession was a very real factor in Biblical times. It still is today, if we are alert to recognize it. Thus, cases of demon possession would be a fourth category of afflicted people whom Jesus healed.

(5) Dead people

This fifth category might be added if we include the three cases of actually deceased people whom Jesus raised from the dead.

There we have the various groups or divisions of the many people Jesus healed. Presumably there were far more than 32 or 33 healings which are recorded in the gospels. But these, at least, constitute a representative sampling, to give us an idea of our Lord's versatile power.

The next logical question would be, "How did Jesus heal those who came to Him?" Did He use supernatural powers alone? Or, were His therapeutical techniques those which now have become common to medical and psychological practice today? Don't misunderstand! I do not minimize our Lord's greatness in any way. But, when we examine the various methods used by Jesus in bringing healing to the minds and bodies of mankind, we discover that He used no set pattern or approach. At times He would command the patient to do some thing incredible or impossible. For example, He commanded the man with the shriveled, paralyzed arm to stretch it forth. He told a helpless paralytic to take up his bed and walk. Now, anyone could see that these afflicted persons could not do these things... but they did!

On other occasions, Jesus issued orders that must have seemed stupid and ridiculous to the subjects and everyone else. He told a leper to present himself to the religious officials after he was healed. He told a blind man to wash clay from his eyes at the Pool of Siloam. Each order seemed senseless, but there was a purpose! The outcast leper had to be reinstated to the community of Israel, and only the priests could do this. Aside from this reinstatement, he would still be considered "unclean!" The blind man was sent to the Pool of Siloam since there was a shady, colonnaded area there, which would furnish shade from the glare of the sun, and not hurt his sensitive, newly healed eyes when they were opened after washing.

Sometimes, Jesus required cooperative faith from His patients, while at other times, He did all the work alone, minus any faith from the subject at all. The woman with the hemorrhage condition put forth her hand in faith to touch His garment. The man with the paralyzed arm was required to exert his faith, and believe that God would heal him, by stretching forth his withered limb.

Yet, on other occasions Jesus simply commanded and the healing took place. No faith was required on the part of the subject. For example, Peter's mother-in-law who was healed of her fever. Lazarus who was raised from the dead. In both cases, we have no indication that there was or could be any faith present in connection with the miracle.

Furthermore, space was no hindrance to the effectiveness of Christ healing power. Sometimes, He would heal those who were at some distance from His location, merely by uttering a word of command. For example, the Syrophenician woman pleaded with Jesus for her daughter who was at home, possessed with an unclean spirit. Christ granted her request, and when she reached home, the child was well. The government official from Capernaum went to Jesus at Cana to beg Him to come home with him and

heal his son. Instead, Jesus simply spoke the word, and the man's son - 18 miles away - was healed instantly.

The manner of healing differs from person to person as well. Sometimes it was a brief verbal command. Other times, a touch with the hand of Jesus. On occasion, it was the application of spittle or clay to the afflicted part. Or, on still other occasions, there was an extended treatment.

Now, in the light of what we have seen, why should there have been so many different methods of healing? Why didn't Jesus select one technique, say the anointing with oil [which He never did, incidentally!] and use that technique all the time. The answer is that people are all different, and must be treated as personalities, not as animals. Our Lord has the utmost respect for an individual's personality - his needs and feelings as a human being. His treatments, therefore, coincided with the psychological makeup of the individual, just as a doctor will treat a nervous patient far more tenderly than someone who is hardy and accustomed to medical routine.

I wonder if we realize that our Lord never used miracle power when human skill would suffice. Of course, there were some cases which could only be handled supernaturally, by the exercise of His divine skill. But, it is remarkable how many of our Lord's healing techniques have been duplicated in some degree today by serious men of science. You see, Christ has command of skills and knowledge which were generally unknown in His day, 2000 years before our era. However, painfully and gradually, some of these skills have been discovered by the laborious research of dedicated men and women of science since that time. Jesus never counteracted the laws of nature by His miracles. He merely made use of universal laws which man had not yet come to know.

Sin has always tended to retard human progress, Thus, what little man knows has been gained slowly and at great cost. But, our Lord had no sin. Thus, in His perfect humanity, He saw clearly and used effectively the principles and laws which our most brilliant scientists are only beginning to touch upon slightly now - almost 2000 years later.

For example, Jesus well knew the value of a mental catharsis experience for those to whom He ministered. That is, the release and relief which comes from the confession of hidden, secret sins, in order to find deliverance from guilt feelings. Much of Jesus ministry was centered about forgiving sin. How often we hear those words of comfort from His lips, "*Your sins are forgiven. Go and sin no more!*" This catharsis experience of purging one's mind of a sense of repressed guilt, is one of the keys to modern psychology and

psychiatry. Very often, cases of apparent physical illness, even blindness and paralysis, can be cured instantly if the heavy burden of guilt is lifted by clergymen, psychiatrists, nurses, doctors, etc. This is a rather modern discovery of medical science. Yet, our Lord may have used it during His earthly ministry in the first century.

Or, consider another much-used technique in modern healing, the power of suggestion. Suggestion is the ability to get an idea past the person's critical faculties into the depths of his mind. Whether we know it or not, the Church uses this power of suggestion constantly. The sound of church bells or carillons; the soft mellifluous tones of the organ; the sight of an open Bible on or below the pulpit; a beautiful altar with beautiful cross or statue; the service of baptism or communion - all these suggest thoughts of comfort, assurance, contentment, peace, and confidence.

Now, did Jesus use the power of suggestion in His healing ministry? Most certainly He did! In John chapter five, we have the story of the man who had been laying for 38 years by the Pool of Bethesda, waiting for the moving of the water. According to a legend, whoever of the assorted invalids first entered the water after the stirring would be healed. Now, it is incredible that, for 38 years, this one man had failed to get into the water first. The fact was, he did not want to be cured. Probably at first, he had tried to get to the water. But later on, he rationalized his predicament. He enjoyed being an invalid. You know, there are such people who enjoy being sick; it relieves them of much responsibility which they pass off onto others.

So, when Jesus asked the invalid, "do you really want to be cured?" it awakened within the man a deep-seated conflict between his human decency and his desire to shirk the responsibilities of life. In short, Jesus was suggesting that the man was not cured because way down deep inside he did not really want to be cured. And when Christ told him to take up his bed and walk, his ability to do this was partly due to Jesus' mental suggestion.

Or, recall the use Jesus made of saliva and clay in anointing a blind man's eyes. This served absolutely no purpose medically. But it did suggest the idea of healing and it quickened the blind man's faith. The woman who reached to touch Jesus' garment was making use of auto-suggestion (self-suggestion). She had talked herself into this act of supreme faith, and this was half the battle.

So, today, almost 2000 years later, many people are "cured" of all sorts of ailments by the power of suggestion - perhaps, the very same principles used by our Lord when He was on the earth. Of course, suggestion alone is not

sufficient to account for the immediate cures our Lord performed. For His was not only the skill of a perfect, sinless humanity. It was also the power of God - the perfect control over all the forces of life and death, sickness and health. We shall see in our subsequent studies how all of this applies today.

CHAPTER NINETEEN WHEN DID MIRACLES CEASE?

James 5:13-16

"¹³ Is any one among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise. ¹⁴ Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; ¹⁵ and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects."

The question that is posed by the title of this message is rather ambiguous. Of course, it would be relatively simple, superficial, and somewhat naive to say that miracles did not cease; they are still going on today. Surely, there is ample evidence in history and at the present time to show that God still works wonders beyond human comprehension. Just a casual appraisal of the world about us will illustrate this. The miracle of physical life given to over four million babies in the United States every year is testimony to the miraculous. The marvelous manner in which a baby's intricate body is formed in the mother's womb is nothing short of a miracle. It brings to mind the words of the psalmist, *"How fearfully and wonderfully are we made"* (Psalm 139:14).

The commonplace, accepted factors in the universe of which we are a part furnish additional corroborative evidence of miracles. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the growth of plant life from a tiny seed, the death and rebirth of vegetation every year, the tiny infinitesimal, yet perfect patterns of snowflakes, each different from the other; all of these constitute distinct miracles in themselves, existing in the midst of a universe of miracles, which we take for granted.

And of course, in the field of medical science, virtually any surgeon will tell you of hospital cases which had been abandoned as hopeless. Yet, the patients were restored in what we are pleased to call "miraculous fashion."

So, the age of miracles has not ceased by any means. The only difference is: We have, in many instances today, come to accept as "normal" and "commonplace" what earlier generations called miraculous.

However, for our purposes in this study, we are not discussing miracles as a whole, but miraculous healing as performed through human agency. That is,

we are considering the instantaneous relief or cure of some seemingly serious, perhaps even fatal, ailments. The question thus arises: Do the sudden, dramatic healings of organic ailments take place today as they apparently took place in New Testament times? Are there those in our day, like Jesus and His disciples, who can touch a leprosy victim, and cause him to be instantly healed?

Is there anyone today like Simon Peter, or John, who can walk up to a paralytic and say, "*silver and gold I have none, but such as I have, I give In the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk.*" Are there miracle workers today who can enter a funeral parlor and throw the funeral service into a panic by raising the corpse to life again as Jesus did or Peter? If there are such miracle workers around, and if such wonders do take place, then I will admit that the age of healing miracles has not ceased. Then it will be obvious that the miraculous power Jesus gave to His disciples has proceeded down the centuries to our time.

But, if this is so, then the next logical question is, "Why isn't this healing gift used more extensively in Christendom, if it really exists? Why doesn't every Christian church have a healing clinic to take care of the multitudinous ills to which people are subject? Why is this ministry confined to the fringe groups of Christianity - the charismatic sects?"

Now, before we consider such zealous, ambitious ideas, let us be very sure we understand some basic principles that will clarify the issue. First, what was the original purpose of spiritual healing in New Testament times? That is, why did our Lord perform miracles of healing and commission His immediate followers to do the same? And why did the early Church use the power of healing as one of its ministries? Were these touches of healing power merely humanitarian gestures?

The issue is not quite as simple as it appears on the surface. There are several things which must be considered at this point. First of all, remember how poor medical science was in the first century. We moderns who are so accustomed to up-to-date techniques of today's physicians and surgeons are horrified when we discover what once passed for medical skill in past ages. All sorts of magical and sensual devices were used to invoke spirits or gods of healing. Intermingled with these occult, weird practices were the commonplace household remedies, which are still in use today. Thus, sick people were subjected to applications of heat or cold, baths in sacred rivers, blood-letting, the use of leeches, massage, application of oil, prayers and incantations to gods and goddesses, sympathetic magic, the use of herbs, witchcraft [that is today often called voodoo].

It was not until the golden age of Greece that we find any really scientific medical system. From 500 BC until the rise of the Roman Empire. Greece led the world in healing practices. By the fourth century BC the Hippocratic collection of philosophic medicine came into being. This included the well-known "Hippocratic oath" which is still nominally accepted by modern physicians.

During the time of Christ and the apostles, Rome had gained control of Palestine, although the Romans contributed little to medical knowledge. A corps of doctors was assigned to each of the major towns and cities of the Roman Empire, particularly to treat the Roman armies which were garrisoned there, although civilians were also eligible for such primitive care as was available. Clearly, however, medical skill was desperately poor. And this is one reason why the Savior included healing in His program - to minister to the physical sufferings of a needy humanity.

It is important to notice, however, that healing always took a decidedly second place in the program of our Lord and His followers. That is, while Jesus and His disciples did go about healing the sick, this ministry was invariably subservient to the *kerygma*, or preaching work. In other words, we can definitely say that healing was a by-product - an accessory or extracurricular activity - not at all essential to the main purpose of Christ's Kingdom.

Indeed, if we can say anything at all about healing, we can say that it was a sign to indicate the divine character of both the messenger and the message Jesus and His followers preached. For example, even today when missionaries go to some primitive, hostile tribe of heathen, they often gain entrance by the use of some of the "miracle drugs" which promote rapid healing of the diseases of the people. Thus, the natives - not understanding the scientific principles back of these drugs - take the speedy healing as a sign or an omen of the approval of their gods on the newcomer.

In the same way, Jesus and His followers performed healing miracles, in part, to offer a sign to the unbelieving populace. We all know that frequently the religious leaders of our Lord's day demanded a sign from Him to authenticate His character and His actions. Their slavery to signs and omens was a superstitious carry-over from the Old Testament accounts of the wonders God performed in still more primitive times. Indelibly there seems to have been written on their hearts and minds, "unless we see a sign, we will not believe."

Healing miracles were unquestionably a sign to the people, to indicate the authenticity of the Christian message. This was not true so much of our Lord,

but His followers. For we can hardly think that Christ performed miracles merely to satisfy the whims of a sinful people. Frequently, you recall, He denounced the whole slavish idea of "giving signs to prove His ministry."

"It is an evil generation that asks for a sign. I tell you, no sign will be given but the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and nights in the fish's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:39; Luke 11:29; Matthew 16:4).

You see, our Lord felt that His resurrection should be a sufficient sign to convince even the most skeptical person. Of course, there were times when He specifically performed miracles in order to fulfill prophecy. On one occasion, after John the Baptist had been cast into jail. John's disciples came to Jesus with the question. John could not understand why, if Jesus were the long awaited Messiah, how He would let one of His faithful servants rot in jail without doing something to get him out. So, John sent his disciples with the question: "Are you really the promised Messiah, or did our teacher, John, make a mistake?"

In response, Jesus said nothing. He just began to perform some miracles before the eyes of John's disciples. He cured diseased people, He cast out demons, He opened the eyes of the blind, He cleansed lepers, He unstopped the ears of the deaf, He gave the ability to walk to the lame. Then, Jesus said to the disciples of John, "go back and tell John what you have just seen of healing miracles. Then, let him check the Scriptures to see what they predicted concerning the Messiah's miracles. John can draw his own conclusions therefrom."

The question we are examining in this chapter, however, concerns the cessation of miracles. When did miracles so clearly performed in New Testament times by Christ and His immediate followers, cease? As we read the book of Acts, we find that miracles were definitely performed in the early Church. But how long did this sort of thing go on?

Something very interesting is found when the writings of the Church fathers are examined, in the period after the original apostles. At times, these Church fathers protested vehemently that all miracles had ceased, Yet, elsewhere in the same writings are found boasts of healings and wonders still taking place then. For example, Chrysostom, the fourth century silver tongued orator, flatly declared, "of miraculous powers, not even a vestige is left." Yet, elsewhere in his writings, Chrysostom claimed a number of instances of

miracles in his day. The same procedure is found in other Church fathers as well.

Now, how do we explain this obvious contradiction? Well, the simple fact is that the Church had begun to acquire a "miracle complex." It was popular to be known as a performer of miracles. Such a wonder worker would be looked upon as a man singularly blessed by God. Thus, the writings of the Church fathers are abound with claims of miracles in order to impress their readers with the fact that God was still at work through them, even in the second, third, fourth centuries and beyond.

However, interestingly, none of these Church fathers claimed healing powers for himself; it was always "the other fellow" who performed the miracles. Sometimes, in their more lucid moments, the Church fathers would be candid enough to admit that they had not really seen any miracles at all.

When a comparison is made between the miraculous accounts of the Gospels and the supposed, miracles of the second through the fourth centuries and beyond, it can readily be seen that the miracles of the Bible are simple, majestic, serious and divine. On the other hand, many of the miracles claimed in later years in the Church were wild, romantic, naive, fantastic and imaginative. Let me give you an illustration. Think of any of the grand miracles of the New Testament. Then contrast it with this miracle recited by Justinian.

A certain Jewish boy ate some holy communion bread by mistake. A priest of the church discovered it and was furious. So, he threw the boy into a fiery furnace. But, miraculously, the boy was kept from harm.

Or, consider this one by Gregory of Tours:

A church deacon was preparing communion. Suddenly, the loaf of bread flew out of his hand and placed itself miraculously on the altar.

These two illustrations will give you some idea of the childishness of some of the miracle stories of post apostolic days. It takes a rather vivid imagination to believe these accounts. Furthermore, they do not really serve any particular purpose.

Well, with this as background, we are now ready to answer the question: "When did miracles cease? If we think of miracles as instantaneous,

inexplicable works, performed by Godly men in healing the organic ailments of others, it can only be said that such miracles ended when the need for them was gone. After all, remember what we have suggested, that the principle need of New Testament healing miracles was to authenticate the ministry of Jesus and His apostles before a world that demanded divine signs.

The written Word of God (the Bible) was not completed until the end of the first century. Until that time, the preached Word (*the Kerygma*) was stamped with the divine approval by signs, wonders and miracles. Recall, for example, the words of the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost. "*Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God, with mighty works and wonders and signs which God through him*" (Acts 2:22). Here, it is clearly stated that the miracles were performed to demonstrate or attest Christ's authority.

However, once the divine Word was completed, and certainly by the time copies had been widely circulated, the need for miracles as corroborative evidence was gone. The Word of God written replaced the miraculous element. From that time onward, God's messengers could base their authority on the written Word of God. Instead of saying, "Look! We are God's spokesmen: The miracles we perform prove this!" - They could say, "See! We are God's spokesmen! Our message conforms to God's Word." It was for this reason that St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "*our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when that which is perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away.*" Man's incomplete spiritual knowledge had to be bolstered by an imperfect miraculous ministry. But, when the perfect Word of God came, the imperfect "crutch" of miracles vanished.

Now, of course, I do not claim that God no longer works miracles today; He does: He is God, and can heal supernaturally any time it pleases Him. Nor do I say that He does not use human beings as channels for His miracles - for He does! Physicians, psychologists, psychiatrists, surgeons, ministers and other church workers - can all be used by God in the ministry to suffering humanity, I do say, however, that it is not now, nor has it ever been, the primary business of the Church to spend its God-given time in attempted healing practices. These fields belong to medical men who are trained in the practices of healing. The primary task of the Christian Church is to make disciples for Jesus Christ and to train them in the things of Christ - things of eternal consequence.

The last two things Jesus Christ said to His followers were:

"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And, "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Matthew 28:19-20).

The Church has a temporal ministry – yes! It has the ministry of social service and it ought to attend to that ministry. But its eternal ministry is far more important.

It will usually be discovered that any Christian group which enters the field of supposed miraculous healing sooner or later loses interest in the primary task of the Church, and becomes satisfied with irrelevant side issues. Gradually--almost imperceptibly at first--and then, increasingly as times goes on, the "healing craze" assumes greater and greater proportions until it overshadows the teaching, witnessing and social service program of the Church. Let it suffice now to say that the Christian Church has a sufficiently large task in its God-given obligation of ministering the Word and the sacraments, without the added burden of a dubious healing practice, a responsibility which ought to be left to trained professionals.

But there is another factor that must be kept in mind. Unfortunately, as the Church loses more and more confidence in the written Word of God, it feverishly seeks for some gimmick to replace biblical exposition, so that church members will not realize the spiritual vacuum which exists. The turning to healing programs is, to my way of thinking, a drowning church, grasping at a last straw.

I am, of course, well aware of the well documented cases of "spiritual healing" on record, performed by dedicated men and women of God. I also know there are psychosomatic ills being healed by reputable clergymen in their regular line of pastoral counseling. I do not find fault with this. It is splendid. But, I am convinced that, when the Church dabbles in healing programs on a large -scale basis, it is entering a field where it has no business to be. And, at the same time, it is neglecting work that it should be doing.

Miracles have ended - insofar as they were essentially testimonies to a speaker's authority from God. If they are practiced in the churches today, they are, at best, extracurricular activities, foreign to the principal plan of God. And, at worst, Satanic, devilish devices, to detour man from the divine path.

CHAPTER TWENTY DOES GOD WANT EVERYONE TO BE HEALTHY

James 5:13-16

"¹³ Is any one among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise. ¹⁴ Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; ¹⁵ and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects."

The question posed by the title of this chapter is a rather difficult one to answer. If we say "yes, God does want everyone to be healthy," we are faced with the problem of overcrowded hospitals, mental institutions and homes for incurable people. These places clearly tell us that not everyone is healthy. Then, we must admit that God's plan does not include everyone being well.

On the other hand, if we say that God does not want everyone to be healthy, we make Him look like a divine monster who delights in torturing His creatures. This is the dilemma in which Christendom has found itself over the centuries. In addition, there seems to be a direct contradiction within the ranks of the Church over the issue of health and sickness.

On the one hand, there are the traditionally orthodox historical denominations such as the Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Episcopalians, Reformed, etc. These groups have long held that it may very well be God's will for some people, even some Christians, to be afflicted and to suffer illness, pain and disease. In this way, the suffering Christian becomes an example, trophy and testimony to God's grace. However, other branches of the Christian Church, such as the Pentecostal, Holiness, Pillar of Fire, Church of God, etc. believe that it never is God's will for His people to be sick. They insist that, if anyone is sick, it is his own fault. It is a testimony that his faith is not strong enough for him to be healed.

Now, clearly, with such a situation abroad, confusion reigns. Both groups claim to believe the Bible, quote it, worship the triune God, believe in salvation by God's grace. Yet, on the matter of God's will in relation to sickness and health, they come to a distinct parting of the ways. So, I feel that it will be helpful to us to spend some time reexamining the question, "does God want everyone to be healthy?"

First of all, what do we mean by the term "healthy?" If we want to discover whether or not God wants people healthy, we had better begin with a definition of "health." Dr. Leslie D. Weatherhead, the contemporary British Methodist preacher, has built up quite a reputation for himself as a student of psychology and health and religion. In one of his books, *Psychology Religion and Healing*, Dr. Weatherhead offers splendid definition of what it is to be "healthy." he says that "health is the complete and successful functioning of every part of the human being in harmonious relationship with every other part and with the surrounding environment."

For example, if the triangularly shaped muscle in our chest which we call the heart is functioning satisfactorily, with all of its valves and channels in top working order, we say the heart is "healthy." But, if one of the valves begins to leak blood, or if there is a partial blockage or clot in a vein or artery which curtails the regular flow of blood through the heart, then the heart is decidedly not healthy. Further, since the heart must work in perfect harmony with the other important organs of the body, if anything happens to disrupt this steady routine, health is replaced by sickness.

This same principle holds true for the whole body and all of its constituent parts. Each bodily member must perform its designated function appropriately if a state of health is to exist. And because a person is more than just a body, the mental and emotional faculties enter into the picture of health as well. That is, if a person's mental or emotional processes do not function properly and harmoniously, health is absent.

For example, here's a man who finds it difficult to coordinate things in his mind. Perhaps he cannot gather his thoughts properly, due to some malfunctioning in the brain area. If this is so, he is not a healthy person, even though physically he may be all right otherwise. Or, even if a person's brain and central nervous system are in perfect working order, the man may find himself gripped by fears when there is no rational cause for fear.

Some people have an overwhelming compulsion to touch every lamppost or tree as they walk along. Others must brush their teeth with precisely 122 strokes horizontally and 122 strokes up and down, something like a ritual. Still others may have an emotional imbalance which starts them sobbing at odd times, and for no apparent reason. In all such cases, even though the brain may have no injury, there is a deep-seated problem or disturbance; a sort of obsession; an aggravated sentimental neurosis which immediately cancels the idea of a healthy person.

Now, if health can be replaced by sickness in the realm of body and mind, this is also true in the realm of spiritual things. If a person is truly healthy, he must be well-adjusted and functioning harmoniously within himself and in relation to his environment, in all areas - bodily, mentally and spiritually. Only then can he truly be considered healthy.

But, now that we have definitions behind us, let us ask our question again: "Does God want everyone to be healthy? The only answer we can give is twofold: (1) Yes - God does want man to be healthy, and (2) No - He does not want man to be healthy. Both of these answers are correct, even though it may sound like double-talk. You see, there can be no doubt that, when God first created man, He intended great things for him. Adam was made a living being, created in the image of God with a tremendous potential lying before him, in return for obedience. If he had listened to the voice of God instead of the voice of the devil, man would have been exalted to a state of holiness and glory which still awaits the redeemed children of God in the future. Man's body was free of sickness and disease and would never have encountered the afflictions, if he had not yielded to temptation.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE THE TREATMENT OF THE SICK

James 5:13-16

"¹³ Is any one among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise. ¹⁴ Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; ¹⁵ and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects."

In the last several chapters, we have been examining some phases of the healing question. Our purpose has been to more fully be prepared for the study we come to in this chapter. We have tried to suggest some down-to-earth ideas with regard to the healing question in preparation for the actual study of these verses.

The text opens with a reference to three classes of people: the afflicted or suffering; (2) the merry or cheerful; (3) the sick. The first group, "the afflicted" or "suffering," are those whose lives seem to be surrounded by trouble or calamity on every side. The husband loses his job; his wife trips over one of Junior's toys and falls, breaking her arm; the washing machine breaks down; and Junior gets the mumps. Everything seems to come at once, one difficulty after another. This is the sort of a person James is describing - one whom we would call "hard luck Harry." Surely, all of us have faced days, or even weeks, when everything seemed to go wrong and problems piled up before us. When such things happen, the text has a ready solution: "Do any of you face suffering or affliction? Well, pray!"

This is always good advice. None of us can ever spend too much time in prayer. One of the sad truths we must all face is that most of us, unfortunately, tend to neglect prayer until something goes wrong. Then, we make a mad dash to God's presence: "O Lord, why this? Why? Why? Why? The reason why is that God sometimes has to send us adversity, so that we will make time in our busy lives to fellowship with Him. So, *"if any among you face affliction or suffering,"* says James, *"let him pray!"*

Second: *"Is any one of your number cheerful?"* What a note of irony must be sensed here. We Christians who have been called out of darkness to God's marvelous light, have been equipped with the joy of the Lord. When we

consider our glorious heritage in Christ - our present position - our future hope - we should be bubbling over with joy. Yet, James has to ask, *"Is there any one among you who is cheerful?"* This should be taken as a severe indictment of our gloomy Christian appearance. But it's true: Stand in the pulpit of any church and look at the sour, somber faces of Christian people, and you never dream they possessed the "Joy of the Lord." I suspect James must have done this on some occasions. In fact, about the only faces that might be more sour than those that are seen in a congregation of Christians could be those of the ministers sitting on the platform. So, James says, "if you are cheerful - sing praise!"

However, it is with this third class of people that we are particularly concerned in this chapter: "Is any among you sick?" The Greek word translated "sick" here literally means someone who is weak, powerless, infirm, diseased, ill in some way - usually in a serious manner. This does not refer just to those who face problems, hardships, general affliction or suffering, but someone who is definitely sick - physically, mentally, emotionally, etc. What shall be the procedure for such a person?

In essence, James says that the sick person must be treated with medicine and prayer. I haven't the slightest doubt that, if James were alive today, and someone came to him saying "Brother James - I don 't feel well. Can you help me?" James would tell the man to lie down and rest. Then he would go to the telephone and make two phone calls. The first would be to a good reputable physician. The second call would be to the pastor or chairman of the board of deacons or elders. For, we have already seen that James was a very down-to-earth, practical man. He would want the physician to prescribe medicine, and the elders or deacons to offer prayer.

In fact, the only reason James did not say (in our text), "Call the doctor.. is that medical science was so poor and inadequate in the first century, that it was almost futile to send for a doctor. Several chapters back, I outlined for you some of the techniques used by first century doctors in their "healing" ministries. It would almost be a case of the old saying, "The treatment was 100% effective. Only there was one small mishap; the patient died."

James advised sending for the elders of the church, so that they might pray over the sick man. Incidentally, will you notice that the sick person is told to send for the elders. They can't be expected to be mind readers. They will come if they are sent for, but they have no way of knowing anyone is ill unless they are told. I stress this for a reason. Any pastor can tell you of people in his church who are easily offended because the pastor and deacons did not come to see them while they were sick. Then, someone asks them, "Did you

call the pastor and deacons to tell them you were sick?" The usual reply is, "Of course not! "Well, how was the pastor to know of illness unless he was notified?" Thus, James says, "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church!"

One other thing. The Biblical procedure is for the sick person to "call for the elders" to come to him. He is not to go to a healing meeting in a church, tent, hall or other place. Let the elders come to him; not let him be brought to the elders. This would immediately rule out the healing meetings so prevalent in our day, on biblical procedure alone. And if someone says, "Oh you're making a big issue over some trivial detail." I remind such people that the modern-day healers make a big issue out of a few texts, taken out of context, and sometimes not even found in the best Greek manuscripts.

The next thing I want you to notice is also a very important point. For James clearly says that the sick person must be treated medically before he is prayed for. Actually, our English translations obscure a very important point which is brought out by the Greek text. Let me offer a more adequate translation of verse 14: "Is any one among you sick? Let him call to him the elders of the assembly and, after they have massaged him with oil, let them pray over him in the name of the Lord..." Note that again! The prayers of the elders were to come only after the rubdown with oil. You see, this oil bath was actually the medical treatment - not a ritual or sacrament. I will demonstrate this in a moment and you will see what I mean.

But, try to picture the situation. Here is a man who is seriously ill. He calls for the elders of the church since he is a Christian, and since he knows the medical practitioners of his day (the first century) are incompetent. The elders arrive and before they offer prayer, they will want to do what they can to ease the man's pain. One of the oldest remedies known to man is oil, possibly olive oil, with its soothing qualities. It was commonplace for a sick person's body to be rubbed with oil, just as today, a hospital nurse will rub a patient with alcohol.

Recall that, when the Good Samaritan found the man who had been beaten and robbed, he bathed his wounds, pouring in oil and wine. The wine acted as an antiseptic because of its alcoholic content; the oil acted as a soothing agent to ease the pain. The well-known historian Josephus, tells us that when King Herod was so seriously ill, a full-sized tank of oil was brought and he was immersed in it to help soothe his illness and his pain. Aulus Cornelius Celsus, the first century Latin scholar who compiled eight volumes of medical knowledge, wrote that rubbing a feverish sick person with oil, reduced the fever. So, the church elders would do what they could to ease the sick man's

suffering by applying the home remedy of massaging with olive oil. And this was done, not with just a few drops, sacramental fashion, but with a liberal portion massaged into the body. Only then, did the elders gather around the man's sickbed to pray over him.

Unfortunately, through the years, certain groups within the church have seized on this oil bath and have ascribed magical or supernatural elements to it. Probably this has been due to the use of the word "anoint" in the text. Frankly, I believe this is a very poor choice of terms. The Greek word does not mean "to anoint" in the sense we generally think of it, at all.

In Greek, the word for "anoint" is *chrío*, from which we get the term "Christ," the Anointed One of God." Whenever the New Testament uses this word, it refers to some episode in which a holy, sacramental anointing is involved. For example, Acts 10:38, *"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit."* or Luke 4:18, *"The Spirit of God is upon me because he anointed me to preach."*

However, the Greek word used in our text means to apply, rub on, or massage, with no special sacred ritual involved at all. If this text had been rendered "massage" instead of "anoint" as it should have been, much of the extremism of the healing groups might have been avoided. The oil, here, is merely for medicinal purposes. Thus, keeping in mind the purpose of the oil application, we might very well paraphrase the text as follows, today: *"Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church. And, after they have given him an aspirin and called the doctor, let them pray over him in the name of the Lord."* This would very accurately convey the meaning of what James had in mind. Ease the pain; do medically what you can; pray over him. These three steps.

Essentially, I believe this would be the interpretation of the text in general cases. However, I think we have something more involved than just general illness. The fact that verse 15 mentions something about sins being forgiven, offers the key to another equally important approach. For the Bible tells us that some sickness may be caused by specific sin. Understand, we have no right to assume, when we see some afflicted person, that this is a direct judgment of God upon him. Recall when Jesus and His disciples happened upon the man who had been born blind. The disciples were already with a "pat answer" to the problem. To them it was obvious. Either the man himself or his parents had sinned. Thus, as a judgment, God saw to it that he was born blind.

However, if you read the story in John 9, you will see that Jesus denied both of those explanations. It simply is not true that every person who becomes sick is being specially judged by God. There may be many other reasons for illness. However, Scripture does teach that sometimes, in the life of a Christian, God does send sickness and even death, as direct judgments for sin.

For instance, in the church of Corinth, some of the Christians had become such gluttons that they came to the holy communion service and stuffed themselves with bread and wine - without any regard for the holiness of the occasion. God sent a distinct judgment on them for their sin, and many of them became sick and died. We read about this episode in I Corinthians 11:29ff, *"For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died."* This was Paul's warning to the Corinthians that God will not tolerate any trifling with sacred things. We have a similar illustration in the story of Ananias and Sapphira in the book of Acts, chapter five. They were Christian church members who wanted the praise of their fellow Christians, and to get it, they were willing to lie to both God and man.

Everyone in the church was bringing good sized gifts into the church treasury, and each gift was received with the acclaim of man. Ananias and his wife decided to get on the bandwagon. They sold some property and decided to bring only a part of the money to the church, keeping the rest of it for themselves. Now, it must be understood that this would have been entirely acceptable to God and the church, for no one of those church members was required to bring anything. What they did bring to the church was entirely voluntary.

However, Ananias and his wife dreamed up a plan to tell the church they were bringing the whole purchase price, while they only brought a part. For this lie, God sent the judgment of death - physical death - to them as an example to the church.

In Bible language, this is known as "the sin unto death" - referred to by John in his first epistle, chapter five, verses 16 and 17. That is, God may at times send sickness and even physical death to His children if they fall into deep sin and get out of His will. Understand, this must not be taken as an indication that all sickness is a direct judgment of God. Certainly not. But there are occasions when the sin unto death becomes a reality in the lives of God's people.

In fact, St. Paul urged the Corinthian church to hold a special prayer meeting concerning one of its members who had engaged in gross immorality. Paul said, *"being assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus, and I, with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus..., this man is to be consigned to Satan for the destruction of the body, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord..."* (1 Corinthians 5:4-5 NEB). In short, Paul was asking the church to pray for the death of this man so that he might not continue to go on into still deeper immorality. This "sin unto death" is serious business.

Fortunately, in the case of the Corinthian sinner, there was a repentance and a return back to the Lord. Thus, when Paul heard of the man's change of heart, he wrote the church of Corinth to "let up" on him. *"For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough. So you should rather turn and forgive him and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So, I beg you to reaffirm your love for him"* (11 Cor. 2:6-8).

Returning now to our text in James 5, I believe that this text may also have some important reference to the "sin unto death." Here's a Christian who gets out of the will of God. He goes from sin into deeper sin. The Holy Spirit who indwells him, attempts to convict him, but he pays no attention. Finally, the Holy Spirit ceases to deal with the man. If he wants to be rebellious - let him be rebellious! This is the attitude the Lord ultimately takes in a situation like this.

We have a beautiful, and yet tragic, illustration of this principle in the book of Hosea. In Hosea 5:12, God speaks of Ephraim, His people, who were idolatrous and sinful. At first, God dealt with them softly, and tenderly. He said, *"I am like a moth to Ephraim..."* (Hosea 5:12), gently fluttering about in an endeavor to bring Ephraim back into line. But Ephraim had gone too far in sin, and did not want to turn back. So, God dealt with Ephraim more harshly. He said, *"I will be like a lion to Ephraim"* (Hosea 5:14), roaring, sounding a strong note of warning. But Ephraim turned a deaf ear. And so, as God had said earlier in the book, *"Ephraim is joined to his idols, Let him alone"* (Hosea 4:17).

So, God deals with His erring children. Softly, tenderly, and then directly, and, even brutally. Finally, He leaves the determined sinning Christian to judgment - the judgment of sickness or even death.

However, then there is the sinning child of God who becomes ill. He tries all known remedies, consults doctors, specialists, and no one can help him. Then he realizes that this may be a judgment from God - the sin unto death; because of his sin He calls the elders of the church to him, confesses his sin

to God in their presence. Since his sin was such that it involved the church, the elders must be there as representatives of the church to hear his confession.

They pray over him, asking God to cleanse him from sin and to cleanse him from sickness. And, as verse 16 says, *"the prayer of the righteous man has great power in its effects. If the sickness has been due to the man's serious sin, God will hear, cleanse and heal."* Verse 15 says, *"the prayer of faith [not the oil] will save the sick man and the Lord will raise him up. If he has been, and still is, in a sinful state, he will be forgiven."* Here is the true significance of the passage.

Oh what a warning this text gives to us not to get out of the will of God. How important that we daily seek to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, lest we face the possibility of committing the sin unto death. But at the same time, how great is the faithfulness of God in providing the road back to His favor for those who stray.

"Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace...
Grace that is greater than all our sin."¹

¹ Julia H. Johnston, "Marvelous Grace of Our Loving Lord," (1910)

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO SAVING SOULS AND COVERING SINS

James 5:19-20

"19 My brethren, if any one among you wanders from the truth and some one brings him back, 20 let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."

With this chapter, we come to the close of our exposition of the book of James. Interestingly, James brings before us one more very important subject - reclaiming Christians who have strayed from the truth. In the last chapter, we talked about the danger of the sin unto death. That is, a Christian who gets out of the will of God by committing some sin, and instead of heeding the voice of the Holy Spirit who convicts him of his sin, goes deeper and deeper into it. Finally, the Holy Spirit ceases to warn him and the Lord sends sickness and possibly even death as a judgment. By taking the Christian Home to heaven by the judgment of physical death, God prevents him from going on into still more serious sin. As illustrations of this principle in action, we suggested the cases of Ananias and Sapphira, the Christians who were gluttonizing at the Lord's table at Corinth, and the immoral member of the Corinthian Church who was having an affair with his stepmother.

However, if you notice, all these cases of "the sin unto death" were moral problems. Indeed, in verses 14 and 15, James is concerned only with moral and ethical issues or sins. The Christians in the church who were guilty of immorality, or unethical practices, were urged to confess and forsake their sins and have the elders pray over them. Following this (vv. 16-18), James tells of the tremendous effectiveness of Christian prayer. *"The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects"* (v. 16).

Elijah is suggested as an example of the power of true prayer. He prayed fervently that it might not rain as a sign to the corrupt King Ahab. For three and a half years it did not rain. Then, he prayed again at the close of this period, and it rained in torrents. Here is an illustration of the effectiveness of prayer when utilized by a righteous person, in a righteous way, for righteous purposes.

Incidentally, in passing, we might note that nowhere in the Old Testament account of Elijah do we find that he prayed for rain to cease or to come, as the text in James says. The text James refers to in his illustration (vv. 17-18) is found in I Kings, chapter 17 and 18. Yet, it does not say there that Elijah

prayed for a drought. It simply says that he told King Ahab that the drought was coming. Here is one of those cases in Scripture where comparison of one text with another clarifies an issue. This is oftentimes true in the Bible. You read only one text and get only part of the picture. You read other texts, and the whole picture is presented. Perhaps the most outstanding example of this rule is to be found in the doctrine of Christ's virgin birth. In Isaiah the prophet foretold the birth of Christ. He said, "behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel..." The Hebrew word the prophet used (*'almah*) literally means "a young woman; girl of marriageable age." The Hebrew word tells nothing about whether or not she was a virgin. However, when we read the quotation of the Old Testament text in Matthew's Gospel, there a Greek word is used that unquestionably means virgin (*parthenos*). So, one portion of Scripture clarifies another. Jesus was not only to be born of a young woman of marriageable age, but this young woman would be a virgin, and the child would be conceived without a human father. In the same way, the Old Testament tells us that Elijah announced to Ahab that a drought was coming. But the Old Testament does not tell us Elijah's part in producing the drought. James clarifies the matter by telling us that Elijah not only announced the drought but prayed that the drought might come. In answer to his prayer, it did not rain. Thus, one text acts as a commentary on another. If this principle is kept in mind, it will be discovered that a great many so-called contradictions in Scripture will be cleared up.

One further illustration will suffice. Each of the four Gospel writers - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John - presents a different rendering of the sign Pilate had written to be placed over the head of Jesus on the cross. Matthew says, "*This is Jesus, the king of the Jews.*" Mark tells us that the sign said "*the king of the Jews.*" Luke reports, "*this is the king of the Jews.*" And John writes, "*Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.*" Are these contradictions? No, of course not. It is only when all four are taken together that we have the full inscription: "*This is Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.*" So, we must always take the whole of the Bible as a commentary on every part. Remember what the apostle Peter wrote (11 Pet, 1: 21) - that "*No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.*" This does not mean what the Roman Catholic Church says it means, that no individual Christian has any right to interpret the Scripture, but only the church. Rather, Peter simply meant that we have no right to take any one text out of its context and give it a "private interpretation," divorced from the rest of Scripture. Every verse in the whole Bible must be read and studied in the light of every other verse which forms its ultimate context.

Well, now having dealt with the matter of moral and ethical sin and shortcomings, James moved on to conclude his epistle with another type of

sin, - doctrinal error. In our modern day of pragmatic, practical living, we sometimes tend to make light of doctrine. There is a feeling abroad among contemporary thinkers that it is not what you believe that counts, but what you do. Thus, we are supposed to approve the idea that it does not matter what a person believes, just so long as he lives right. Of course, even though this is the popular feeling today, it is ridiculously false. For a person cannot live right unless he has sound, proper beliefs. I think it can be clearly demonstrated that behind every unethical practice or immoral act is poverty of doctrine.

Let me show you what I mean. Here is a man who commits adultery, an immoral act. If you check to find out why he does this, you immediately discover that his beliefs - his sense of values - are all confused. He has rejected the seventh commandment against adultery. For all practical purposes, therefore, he does not believe the seventh commandment. He has violated the sanctity of marriage, showing his rejection of this biblical doctrine. He is being dishonest; he is filling his life with lies; he is the cause of sorrow and heartache. So, behind the actual act of adultery, is a disregard of the doctrines or teachings of the Word in many realms. And the same situation exists with regard to any immoral or unethical action. Behind the action you will find a doctrinal deficiency.

It is this deficiency in doctrine that James uses as the vital note on which to end his book. Frankly, this is extremely important, since James has been accused of having low regard for doctrine and speaking and teaching only about ethics. Yet, here James unquestionably exalts the importance of doctrine.

In verse 19, James talks about the person who "wanders from the truth." Remember, that these are Christians about whom he speaks. Unfortunately, this text is sometimes taken out of context by soul-winning courses, classes or books. It is applied to unsaved people on many occasions. But this is not what the text refers to, James has in mind the professing Christian who has gone along with the truth of God's Word, but then, for some reason or other, begins to wander from the truth. As verse 19 clearly shows, this wanderer is a "brother in the Lord" - a member of the Christian Church, since James says: "My brethren, if any one among you wanders..."

I don't know if James had a specific person in mind. But the Christian Church through the years, and up to the present, has all too many examples of those who have wandered from the truth. Whenever this happens, it is a good thing to look into causes for wandering. For a person does not lose interest, nor

wander away from a Christian fellowship without some cause. Usually it will be found that the cause of wandering lies in one of three places:

(1) THE PERSON HIMSELF

The individual wandering Christian himself may never have been born again in the first place, and thus there is no foundation to hold him to the truth. Or, if he is born again, he may not have come to grips with his responsibility to the things of Christ.

(2) THE CHURCH

Another possible cause of wandering from the truth may be the church in which the Christian fellowships. It may be cold, indifferent, unconcerned, snobbish. He may find no genuine Christian fellowship there. And with nothing to hold him, he may wander from the truth aimlessly.

(3) OUTSIDE STIMULUS

A third cause for wandering from the truth might be an outside stimulus. Possibly some attraction from the world which has a stronger pull than the truth of God may be the cause. Some cult or ism which attracts a poorly grounded Christian with its novelty may lead him astray. The poor testimony of a fellow Christian may shock and disgust a naive believer. Any one of these things might easily be the cause for wandering for a not-too-solidly based Christian. Thus, I think each of us would do well to examine our lives and our attitudes and relationships to our brothers and sisters in Christ, lest we become the cause of wandering to them by something in our lives. St. Paul makes this very plain in his letter to the Corinthians. He warns Christians concerning their habits, actions and practices and adds, "By sinning against your brother and wounding his conscience, you sin against Christ" (1 Corinthians 8:12).

But now, what is to be done if some fellow Christian does wander from the truth - and it happens all the time. The answer is found implied in the text: Someone is to bring him back. Recall what St. Paul pointed out in his letter to the Galatians. "*Brethren if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness; considering yourselves, lest you be tempted also*" (Gal. 6:1). This advice concerns those believers who get into moral or ethical difficulties. The Church is to treat them gently, helping them if they come in the right spirit to be helped. In a large sense, this is the Christian attitude that should be taken towards the Christian who wanders off into doctrinal error as well. We have no right to condemn him or call him names and heap abuse upon him. We ought to beware of denouncing him as apostate, liberal, modernist, etc. All too often, we evangelicals are ready to do this at the drop of a hat. Scripturally, James tells

us, we ought to try to "bring him back" into line: Help him to see where he is mistaken - and why. We need to point out the truth of the Word, in love. And above all, we need to pray for him, that he might see the error of his ways.

The King James Version says that we must seek "to convert" the sinner from the error of his ways. Here again, the word "convert" may be misleading because of meanings we have allowed to grow up around it. For, in the thinking of most of us, a person is "converted" when he receives Christ and is born again. This is true, but it is not the only sort of conversion that exists.

Remember, a Christian can be converted also, Recall what Jesus said to Peter on one occasion after he had been a follower of Christ for some time and was assuredly born again. Jesus said,

"Simon, Simon: Satan has desired to have you so that he may sift you as wheat. But I prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you are converted, strengthen your brethren"
(Luke 22:31-34).

Peter was a Christian. Yet he needed conversion. So, James tells us that when a Christian brother or sister is off the beam doctrinally – the Church's task is to convert him; to bring him back into line.

Finally then, we see the assurance given to the Christian who succeeds in bringing back the doctrinal prodigal to the fold:

"Let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:20).

Two things are assured to this Christian who recaptures his erring brother: (1) He will save the prodigal's life; (2) He will cover over a multitude of sins. We must not forget that the sin unto death extends not only to Christians who commit grave moral and ethical wrongs, such as Ananias and Sapphira, the Corinthian gluttons at the communion table, and the man who committed fornication with his stepmother. But there are times when God may send sickness and even death to those Christians who get off into false doctrine and refuse to come back into the truth.

For example, here is a Christian who, as far as we know, is born again. He stands firmly in the truth of God's Word. And then, somewhere along the way, he is attracted to one of the false cults - Christian Science, Jehovah's

Witnesses, Spiritism, Unity, etc. He begins to deny the deity of Christ; the full atonement of the cross; the resurrection, and so on. Now, it is quite possible that God may send the judgment of physical death to this Christian to keep him from disgracing the cause of Christ and getting into worse heresy. We can demonstrate that God has done this in the past. St. Paul refers to a case known to him. A man whose name was Hymenaeus, and in 2 Timothy 2:17 Paul points out a doctrinal error in these men: "*Hymenaeus and Philetuse - have swerved from the truth by holding that the resurrection is past already. They are uprooting the faith of some.*" And in his first letter to Timothy, Paul refers to this same man and says, "Some [Christians] have thrown the qualities [of faith and clear conscience] overboard and have shipwrecked their faith; for instance, Hymenaeus - whom I have surrendered to Satan...." (I Tim: 1:19-20). As we have seen, to "deliver to Satan" is Paul's way of saying that he was praying for the death of this man, to keep him from going on into still deeper sin. And, in this case, the sin was doctrinal.

Our text tells us that when we are able to reclaim a heretic, or even an apostate, a Christian who has rejected and repudiated his former loyalty to Jesus Christ and the Word. We have succeeded in saving him from the sin unto death, and we helped to cover over and remove from sight the multitude of sins his wandering may have caused.

Here is one of the reasons why I, personally, strictly avoid denouncing professing Christian leaders as apostates. There is something very final about that term. A man who claims to be a Christian may go far afield doctrinally. He may even deny the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, the blood atonement, everything he once seemed to believe. Yet, I refuse to label him an apostate even though I know he is dead wrong. After all, what good does label-fixing or name-calling do? We have not succeeded in reclaiming the wandering Christian by that means. In fact, we've probably turned him against us by our name-calling, so that we cannot be of any help to him. And in addition, we have created bitterness in the minds of other Christians toward the wandering Christian.

James offers us a logical, Scriptural procedure. If a Christian brother goes astray doctrinally, don't just disassociate yourself from him. Rather, as James says, seek to bring him back. In so doing, we bring him back from the error of his ways, we save him from the sin unto death, and we cover over his guilt through God's pardon.

Oh! How careful we must be in our Christian walk and witness lest we cause a Christian brother to stumble and wander away from the things of the Lord because of some inconsistency in our lives. And then - how ready we must

be, when we learn of a wandering fellow Christian, to do all in our power not to denounce him or castigate him, but to show him our Christian love and attempt to bring him back to sound doctrine once more.

It is on this note of reconciliation and compassion that James closes his epistle. We are to attempt to heal the wounds of the body of Christ, and to be of help and aid, in true Christian love - to those who have need of the compassion of Jesus Christ.

HERBERT HENRY EHRENSTEIN – BIO

From his Memorial Service – edited.

Herb was born an only child in Harlem, New York in 1921. Guided he moved to the Bronx and there he stayed until he went off to war to fight in World War two. He was saved around the age of 15, involved in a New York church almost immediately. One of the defining moments in Herb's life was when he met Donald Grey Barnhouse. He would attend Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia often to hear doctor Barnhouse preach and he attended his bible classes in New York to learn from this man and developed a fond affection for Donald Grey Barnhouse and often spoke of him as a mentor and a friend.

Herb was drafted in 1940 and he fulfilled his duty to his country. He served division accompanying one of the generals, one of the lesser generals under Patton. And as much as he hated war and wished he could be home ministering, he was always very dedicated to his call to arms and he received the Bronze Star. He was in some hairy situations with his general behind enemy lines at times, dodging bullets from time to time as he accompanied this general in order to take his dictation. But what you ought to know is that Herb spent every free time during the war, taking a Moody Bible correspondence course because he knew that God had called him to the ministry.

He enjoyed good fellowship with a few who knew Christ in his platoon and he managed to keep in touch with them for a long time after the war. Now it wasn't too long after the war that Herb enrolled in Eastern Baptist Seminary, which is in Pennsylvania. He graduated three years later. He took his first church while he was still a seminary student and he served in that church for about four years. And then from there he took a pastor position at Bethany Baptist Church in Fox Chase where he pastored for seven years.

It was about that time that he also became a staff member of Philadelphia College of Bible and he taught night courses for a few years as well. It was toward the end of that ministry, that the pastorate that Donald Grey Barnhouse also started came calling for Herb and offered him a position as one of the editors of his magazine, *Eternity Magazine*. And upon Herb's resignation from Bethany, he went to work there for what was then called the *Evangelical Foundation*, which broadcast *the Bible Study Hour*. By the early sixties, Herb left the evangelical foundation to run a series of Bible classes. One which was in New York City and he had taken that one over from his esteemed Bible teacher, Donald Grey Barnhouse, when he died in 1960.

He started one in Philadelphia and then three others in the Greater Boston area, one in Braintree, Massachusetts and another in Andover and one in Lexington. These were established through a friendship that Herb struck up with a man named John DeBrine, who was the Senior Pastor, and evangelist, at the Ruggles Street Baptist Church, and the president and founder of the nationally syndicated Songtime Radio Ministries, based in New England. And Herb often interviewed with John DeBrine on the air and soon became known as "The Bible Answer Man." Herb would spend the next twenty five years making the circuit from Boston to Philadelphia running weekly bible studies. Monday night in Philadelphia, Tuesday afternoon in Lexington, and night in Andover, fly home, rest on Wednesday, Thursday night was the Philadelphia bible, class. His New York class was on Friday nights but that eventually disbanded. The three in Boston and the one in Philadelphia, however, continued long after until Herb himself closed them in 1986 due to poor health. It was hard for him to do that.

Herb developed many close friendships along the way. But it wasn't to be the end of a great relationship between his students and himself. He loved his disciples so much that at the close of his class he found a way to send them weekly Bible studies on tape as well as additional tape that was called Life in Perspective.

And it would often start this way, "These programs are to give you a biblical perspective on life in order to help you to see life in perspective." They talked about things that were going on in the world that Christians should know about. He endeavored to teach the bible until several, severe health problems prevented him around the year 1998, the year when his public and private ministry came to an end.

The Epistle of James

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From Jim Deering, Founder, Author, Editor of AncientPath.net Bible website.

Herb and I developed a close relationship back in the early 1970's while I was a radio studio technician employed by Rev. John Debrine's Songtime Radio Ministry in Boston. Herb and I hit it off right from the very start. I was not a believer at the time. John had hired me to fix his electronic radio equipment, and I (educated in radio programming and announcing) began to teach John what I knew about building an audience. I became his radio technician and worked with and for him for many years. During those years two of my closest friends came to know Herb as well and became two more of his best friends. I place their name here so that at some point they may also share their testimonies about Herb. First there was John Wayne Goguen (pastor), originally from Townsend, Massachusetts and then there was Loren Paul Decker (Christian author and blogger).

My best story about Herb happened back in my first years at Songtime Radio Ministries. I had become a believer by then and Herb and I had become quite close. I would even travel to Philadelphia to visit with him. While in the Songtime studios one day, Herb said he wanted to make a bet with me. I thought that would be fun! His bet... I would apply to the Philadelphia College of Bible and if I got accepted there, I would go. I don't remember what would happen if I didn't. I remember that I was always a poor academic student, even flunked out of my first try at college! I applied and waited for the reply. A week or so later I received my answer as... an acceptance letter! I didn't know that Herb had been there, taught there in the past, and was on the board of directors!! I went, had the best Bible education possible, grew up in Jesus, and met my wife of 50 years at this writing.

About Herb... sometime, back a few years, Herb, at his home, handed me a binder really full of pages. When I got back to Massachusetts I opened it up and it was the contents of a book he wanted to publish, but didn't think it was worth all the effort. The binder was full of typewritten chapters on the Book of James.

I was a young man just starting out from Bible College and placed this binder into my desk for safe keeping. Now, close to 60 years later, digging in some old boxes, I had discovered the binder. Copied, edited, and updated it... and here it is for your enjoyment. It is absolutely worthy of your attention.

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Jeremiah 18:15

"Don't stumble from the Ancient Path."
