

THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK

© 2005 Johnny L. Sanders

Verse By Verse Bible Studies

Religion Pure and Undeclared

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

By

Johnny L. Sanders, D. Min.

DEDICATION

To

Abigail Grace Sanders

“Abby”

I invested a lot of time and energy in prayer for you while we were awaiting your arrival. My investment of time and energy in prayer for you increased while you were in NICU and continued after you went home. And then one day you looked into my eyes and smiled, and I knew that my investments had returned dividends beyond my wildest imagination.

For longer than your father has been in this world, I have been visiting parents with little babies, both in the hospital and in their homes. I have no idea how many parents have agreed with my assessment of their baby’s beauty and intelligence. I do not recall a single parent who has disagreed with me, so when you hear me tell someone about my granddaughter, please do not be embarrassed. Trust me, I am an authority on the subject.

“I thank God upon every remembrance of you” (Phil. 1:3)

FOREWORD

I was still a young pastor when I received a telephone call from Ray Rust, who at the time was pastor of First Baptist Church, Bastrop, Louisiana. He said, “Johnny, I just received a call from Dr. James Horton, pastor of First Baptist, Monroe, Louisiana. He told me that Dr. Luther Hall had recommended you to teach the Book of James in their January Bible Study (now, Winter Bible Conference). He wanted to know if I knew you, and if I would recommend you. I assured him that I know you and encouraged him to call and invite you to lead their Bible Study. You can expect a call in a few minutes and I would like to encourage you to do it.”

Within a few minutes I was on the phone with Dr. Horton. I was thrilled with the opportunity to lead a Bible study at First Baptist Church, Monroe. I had been doing systematic Bible studies since seminary, and at that time I was searching for a format that served my purpose. That Bible conference helped me develop a format for all the studies that would one day be included in The Bible Notebook. It also helped launch a very rewarding Bible teaching ministry that would have me teaching at least one book of the Bible from four to six times each year in various churches from Louisiana, to Mississippi, to Texas, and as far away as Nebraska.

There were some highlights that I will never forget from that study of James at First Baptist, Monroe. For one thing, I was surprised when a number of senior members told me they had earned their masters degree in education from Mississippi College. I asked why they went to MC rather than Northeast Louisiana University (now the University of Louisiana at Monroe), and they told me that NLU was a junior college in those days!

Another highlight was a conversation I had with several men after the session on Thursday evening. The late Bob Sale, owner of Bob Sale Camera Shop, said, “We have been talking about this Bible and trying to figure out what has made this so different from all the other Bible studies we have had.” No, I resisted the temptation to say, “Look at your teacher.” Instead, I replied, “Just look at the subject matter.” The major challenge of the Epistle of James is not in the interpretation of it, but in the application of it.

The third highlight came when Associate Pastor Walter Manghum spoke with me after members left on Friday night. He made the statement, “You were the best prepared teacher we have ever had here.” Before my ego kicked in, I realized that he had not said that I was the most intelligent, the most articulate, or the best teacher. I was the best prepared. I have my doubt about that, but as I look back I recall that I had made it a point to be well prepared - possibly because I did not want to dishonor God, let the people down, or embarrass myself. I made up my mind at that time that I may never be a Bible scholar, or a very good teacher, but I could at least be prepared. I would challenge anyone who teaches the Word of God to be prepared. It is inexcusable to bore people to death while proclaiming the Living Word.

Over the years I kept expanding my studies until many became unique commentaries in

which I target the gap between the critical commentary and the devotional commentary. The Bible Notebook is written with both the pastor and the layperson in mind. It provides help for the busy pastor, and at the same time the layperson will find it readable. Ray Wells, Director of the Church/Minister Relations Department of the Louisiana Baptist Convention uses The Bible Notebook and has my permission to share it with others as he feels led. He writes:

I have used the Bible Study Notebooks of Dr. Johnny Sanders for a number of years.

I have found that he brings together the best of exegetical study and flavors the study of God's word with the devotional insights that encourage, challenge, and assist me in Bible Study. Every year, when I find out what our Annual Bible Study is, I call Johnny and ask what he has on that book. His notes will be a valued tool for Pastors and other Ministerial teachers of God's word. For the Seminary graduate, this will bring together many of the sources that you would want to study. For the Minister that does not have the seminary background, Johnny's Bible Notebooks will give you the best Bible study and do it in language that you will be glad to use. For the BI-Vocational pastor this work is a God-send for you in making the most of your study time.

His Book, *UNDEFEATED: Finding Peace in a World Full of Trouble*, a readable verse by verse study of the Book of Philippians, was written with both the pulpit and the pew in mind. It is an excellent choice for a class or group Bible study.

ABBREVIATIONS

Documentation is handled with brackets at the end of quotations. Abbreviations include the following:

ATR	A. T. Robertson, <i>Word Pictures in the New Testament</i> .
BI	<i>Biblical Illustrator</i>
BKC	<i>Bible Knowledge Commentary</i>
BSB	<i>Believer's Study Bible Notes</i>
DSB	<i>Disciple's Study Bible Notes</i>
RSB	<i>Ryrie Study Bible Notes</i>
NAC	<i>New American Commentary</i>
HBD	Holman Bible Dictionary
MH	Matthew Henry
NCWB	<i>New Commentary on the Whole Bible</i> .

INTRODUCTION

AUTHORSHIP

The author of the epistle simply identifies himself as “James, a servant of Jesus Christ.” In the New Testament there are three men of significance who are named James.

They are:

- (1) James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John (Mark 1:19).
- (2) James, the son of Alphaeus, one of the apostles (Matt. 10:3).
- (3) James, the brother of our Lord (Matt. 13:55).

In this study it will be assumed that the writer is James, the half-brother of our Lord. Only one other James was so well known to the early church that he could have simply identified himself as “James.” That James was the son of Zebedee, the brother of the Apostle John, but that James was martyred in A.D. 44. This epistle seems to have been written a few years after that date, almost certainly before the Jerusalem Conference of AD 51 (Acts 15; Gal. 2).

The name James in the New Testament is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name “Jacob”, which means “supplanter” (one who takes another’s place by crafty means. Consider some of the points of interest about James, the half-brother of the Lord.

1. He heads the list of brothers in Matthew 13:55.
2. He was the half-brother, not the step-brother of our Lord as some have assumed. Jesus was called the first born son of Mary (Luke 2:7); He was the only begotten Son of God (John 1:18).
3. During the earthly ministry of Jesus James did not follow Him.
4. When James was honored with a visit by the risen Christ, James believed and became one of the spiritual giants of the first century (and of all Christian history).
5. In Acts 1:14, James was a part of the company of the committed in the upper room.
6. He became the leader of the Jerusalem church, probably the pastor.
 - a. It was to James that Peter went word of his escape from prison, Acts 12.
 - b. James presided over the great Jerusalem Conference which agreed to accept Gentiles into the church (Acts 15).
 - c. Paul went immediately to James upon his return from the Third Missionary Journey and

received instructions from him.

7. Tradition tells us that James was called “The Just,” and that he was a man of strong character, a man especially known for his prayer life. He was called, according to an ancient tradition, “Old Camel Knees,” because he spent so much time on his knees that they became calloused.
8. According to Josephus, James was brought to trial under the high priest, Annas, when there was no Roman governor in Jerusalem. He was tried for breaking the law and thrown from the temple and stoned (probably in A.D. 62).

Also of interest is the fact that Paul, in Gal. 2:9-10, acknowledged the leadership of James, “but in Gal. 2:11-14, he seems to criticize James for his legalistic influence. Acts 21:17-26 bears out the fact that James leaned heavily toward the Jewish Law.”ⁱ Church tradition ascribes this letter to the Lord's half- brother, and his position in the church makes that claim plausible. But there is more:

Internal evidence is consistent with this view. The most concrete evidences for this identification are the verbal similarities (especially apparent in the early Greek manuscripts) between this epistle and the speech of James at the Jerusalem Conference (cf. Acts 15:13-21).

In addition, this letter, the most Jewish book in the entire New Testament, is indicative of an author steeped in the Old Testament outlook and literature, as James is portrayed to be in Acts. Also the numerous references to nature are what one would expect of a man who had lived in a rural Galilean town like Nazareth (cf. James 1:6, 10, 11, 17; 3:3, 4, 7, 11, 12, 18; 5:4, 7, 17, 18).ⁱⁱ

DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING

The Epistle of James was probably written about A.D. 48-50. The martyrdom of James, the half-brother of the Lord, in A.D. 62 would set that as the latest date for the epistle. “Josephus mentions the martyrdom of James and in so doing supplies evidence of the prominence of James in the early Christian community.”ⁱⁱⁱ It is also possible that “the simple church organization revealed in the epistle, and the comparative absence of major doctrinal content strongly imply a date prior to the appearance of Paul's first writings,”^{iv} and the Jerusalem Conference of A.D. 51. Some even claim that James may well be the earliest book in the New Testament.

RECIPIENTS

The epistle was addressed to the Jewish Christians (1:1-2) who are “scattered abroad” in the Dispersion. While this does not tell us where the readers lived, it is obvious that the epistle was addressed to Jewish Christians. A broader application would, of course, include Gentile Christians. “The Dispersion was composed of Jews who had left Palestine but kept in contact with their “fatherland,” returning home for the feasts when possible.”^v In Acts 2 there were multitudes of devout Jews in Jerusalem from other nations of the world.

Acts 11:19 informs us that many Christian Jews were scattered abroad because of the persecution in Jerusalem. These Jews would maintain separate communities and continue their way of life in these foreign lands. It was to Christian Jews scattered in the Roman Empire (possibly Syria in particular) that James addressed his letter.^{vi}

PURPOSE

The purpose of the epistle was to provide some directions for living the Christian life to those Jewish believers who were scattered throughout the world (with application to all Christians of any period). Many of those early saints were being persecuted for their faith and they were being watched by lost people who would consider their religion very strange. They must be able to withstand the particular trials that would come to them from the authorities and from other religions, as well as the general trials that come to all Christians. For the sake of the Gospel it was imperative that their manner of life be consistent with their claim of faith in Jesus Christ.

THEME

While there are a number of emphases in the letter, the central theme of the epistle is “practical, realistic religion which manifests itself in the behavior or the ‘works’ of those who profess to have faith.”^{vii} In simplest terms, the theme is Religion: Pure and Undeified. The emphasis is the expression, or the manifestation of faith through one’s life, faith that works (faith works!).

Tests for a genuine and living faith are examined in a manner reminiscent of the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament, especially the Book of Proverbs. The idea that James contradicts Paul’s view of justification by faith (2:14-26) is without foundation and fails to account for differing perspectives and purposes for the two writers. James 1:3 provides a good summary of the book.^{viii}

SPECIAL FEATURES

The Epistle of James, as already noted, is similar to the Wisdom Literature of the Old

Testament in many ways, yet it is not simply a gathering of loose and unrelated moral teachings. There is a central theme (genuine faith is manifested by one's works) that runs throughout the book.

James has been called "the Amos of the New Testament." In 108 verses, the author uses 54 imperatives to stress the need for urgent action on the part of these early saints. In addition to the Old Testament flavor of the epistle the student of the Word will want to compare James with the epistles of Paul. It is also extraordinary in its parallels with the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7).

JAMES AND PAUL

Martin Luther, who called James an "epistle of straw", felt that James contradicted Paul on the subject of grace and works. However, as Wiersbe notes:

There are no conflicts between James and Paul on the matter of justification by faith. James could not be contradicting Galatians because Galatians had not yet been written! Paul explains that sinners are justified by faith (Rom. 3-4); James explains that a person's faith is dead unless it is proved by works. We are not saved by works, but the faith that saves us leads to good works. Paul wrote about our standing before God; James wrote about our witness before the world.^{ix}

The more we compare James with the Pauline Epistles, the better we see that the two, rather than contradicting each others, support each other in a remarkable way. James deals in a very practical way with applied Christianity - how we should live. Paul, philosophical genius, rabbinical scholar, and intellectual giant, was inspired to set forth the theological principles upon which the Christian life is nurtured to maturity. What may be missed in Paul's great theological discourses is that he was also very pragmatic and dealt with realistic issues, as may be seen in the Corinthian Epistles.

SUB-THEMES & KEY ISSUES

1. TESTING, 1:2.
2. ENDURANCE, 1:3.
3. WISDOM, 1:5; 3:13-18.
4. PRAYER, 1:5-8; 5:13-18.
5. FAITH, 1:6; 2:14-26.
6. RICHES, 1:9-11; 5:1-6.
7. TONGUE, 1:19, 26; 3:1-12; 4:11.

CHAPTER I

SALUTATION, 1:1.

The 1995 New American Standard Version (NAS) will be the primary translation used in this study. The King James, New King James, and New Revised Standard versions will also be used from time to time.

JAMES. *“James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.”* The letter begins with a conventional opening: the name of the writer, the people to whom the letter is addressed, and a word of greeting. “James was content with a simple introduction. The writer introduced himself modestly. He did not indicate his status in the church or that he was the Lord’s brother. The lack of title suggests that he was well known and had the authority to send a letter of this kind.”^x

James, and Apostles Peter and John, were missionaries to the Jews. “James ministered primarily in and around Jerusalem, but also served in Palestine, and Syria; Peter in Babylon and in Rome; and John in Ephesus and Asia Minor. Peter addressed the Jewish Christians scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, while James wrote to the Jewish Christians in general.”^{xi}

A BOND-SERVANT OF GOD. Literally, James was a “slave” of God. I had the privilege of sitting with Dr. Ed Bloom at a meeting of the Board of Trustees of LifeWay Christian Resources in Nashville, in September, 2000. I am on the Broadman/Holman Committee and one of our responsibilities is the new Holman Christian Standard Bible. Dr. Bloom, the general editor, gave a report and fielded a lot of questions in the meeting. At the noon meal someone who was not on the committee had some questions for Dr. Bloom and LifeWay President, Dr. Jimmy Draper, motioned him to a seat to my right, at the end of the table. The board member asked Dr. Bloom why they translated a number of words the way they did. Dr. Bloom explained that they translated the Greek as literally as possible, and with the aid of a computer, for the first time in the history of translating the Bible, they could instantly check for consistency. Previous translators seemed to shy away from the word “slave,” but that is exactly what Paul and James called themselves in their epistles.

The Book of James is written with an authoritative note, but James does not claim any special authority for himself, nor does he take any glory in his position. The average Pastor Search Committee today probably would not be too impressed with His Resume’. It is enough for him to be known simply as a slave of God and of Jesus Christ. He was a slave to the will of God. This may not be an attractive term for us today, but James had discovered that the only way to be really free is to become a slave to the will of God. Every man is a slave - either to God, or to the world.

TO THE TWELVE TRIBES WHO ARE DISPERSED ABROAD. The NKJV has “to the twelve tribes scattered abroad: Greetings.” It might seem at first glance that the epistle is addressed to all Jews who are scattered abroad among the nations of the world. But as we read the epistle we become aware of the fact that it was written to Christian Jews who were scattered abroad. They were a part of (and distinct from) the over all Diaspora, the dispersion of Jews throughout the world.

Included in their numbers were Jewish believers who had been saved at Pentecost, or at a later date, and then gone back to their home lands with the Gospel, as well as those who had been driven from Jerusalem by the persecution in which young Saul of Tarsus had risen to prominence as a leader of the persecution under the authority of the Sanhedrin. These Christians were being put to the test on a regular basis, persecuted by Jewish authorities and by pagan officials - and it was going to get a lot worse.

This epistle was not specifically addressed to every Christian of every age, but to Jewish believers in the middle of the First Century. However, the message is relevant for all believers of all ages. The message has never been more current than it is today, especially in light of the attitude of the world toward Christianity. That attitude is escalating today in what was once called “Christian America.”

GREETINGS. This greeting is in keeping with the “all joy” in 1:2 and in other verses in the epistle. The Holy Spirit inspired James to express His desire that Christians realize the potential joy promised every believer.

I. CHRISTIANS MAY FACE THE TRIALS OF LIFE WITH JOY, 1:2-11.

A. The Christian Must Expect His Faith to Be Tested, 1:2-4.

1:2 - MY BRETHREN. “*Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials...*” The reader today may automatically assume that James addressed the recipients as “brethren” because all believers are brothers and sisters in Christ. But James, a very Jewish thinker writing to very Jewish readers, may have a double purpose in addressing them as his brethren. This Epistle would be of immeasurable help to Jewish converts to Christ as well as to those who might have been considering placing their trust in Him. The author addresses his readers as brethren throughout the letter. It was a term, not only of endearment, but also of identification. The modern reader can read and apply the great lessons of the Epistle with assurance that the human author could identify both the trials of life and the tests of faith with which every Christian must deal.

CONSIDER IT ALL JOY. James here is correcting Jewish misconceptions concerning adversity. These misconceptions were not of recent vintage, Job’s friends held the same faulty theology way back in the period of the Patriarchs. James shows here that when adversity comes the first response of the true and faithful follower of Jesus Christ is joy: “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials...” The Pharisees would agree with Job’s friends that the first things one needs to do when trials come is to repent. In some cases, that may well be what is needed, but for the believer who is walking in the spirit, the response should be joy.

In verses 2-4 we find that trials faced with joy produce endurance, and in turn, endurance

produces maturity (growth and development) in Christ. But how many believers really count it all joy when they “fall into various trials” (NKJV)? There are trials the Christian will “fall into” rather than invite by courting disaster through reckless living or deliberate rebellion. One may ask, “Are not trials to be dreaded, feared, and avoided?” It may be very difficult for the immature believer to understand why we should count it all joy when we encounter trials, but James points out that trials of our faith are occasions for genuine (not feigned) joy because of the potential triumphs we may anticipate.

Kaufmann Kohler states in the Jewish Encyclopedia that no language has as many words for joy and rejoicing as does Hebrew. In the Old Testament thirteen Hebrew roots, found in twenty-seven different words, are used primarily for some aspect of joy or joyful participation in religious worship. Hebrew religious ritual demonstrates God as the source of joy. In contrast to the rituals of other faiths of the East, Israelite worship was essentially a joyous proclamation and celebration. The good Israelite regarded the act of thanking God as the supreme joy of his life. Pure joy is joy in God as both its source and object. The psalmist says, "Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11).^{xii}

VARIOUS TRIALS. Older students of the Bible are more familiar with the KJV: “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations...” Trials is a better translation than temptations. We must pray that God will deliver us from temptations, but we face trials with a sense of joy because while temptations are attempts to seduce us to rebel against God, trials are opportunities for God to demonstrate what He can, and will, do to help us reach our potential. The Lord permits our faith to be tried or tested, but He will never tempt us to sin.

“Divers temptations” (various trials) may be paraphrased, “many colored trials” (varicolored trials). Like temptations, trials are often in “color” - beautiful and appealing. Some basic observations concerning these trials are in order:

1. Christians are not to rush into these trials in order to make mock martyrs of themselves.
2. Christians should never invited trouble.
3. Christians are not told to submit blindly to things that may be avoided.
4. All trials and difficulties are not designed for out punishment.
5. Trials come to all Christians and those who face them with the right attitude and in the right faith will be stronger for having overcome them. God can depend upon those who stand the test.
6. Trials do not guarantee joy (or Heaven). They leave some people bitter.
7. If faced as the Scripture directs, trials will produce great blessings.

Trials can and should be faced with an attitude of joy. Trials should not be seen by the Christian as a punishment, a curse, or a calamity

but something that must prompt rejoicing. Furthermore they should produce “pure

joy” (lit., “all joy”; i.e., joy that is full or unmixed), not just “some joy” coupled with much grief. Though James’ command was direct and forceful, he did not preach at his audience. He identified with them. He addressed them warmly as “my brothers.” This mode of address is characteristic of the epistle. He used this familiar form no less than 15 times. James’ direct commands are coupled with deep compassion.^{xiii}

The famous blind songwriter Fanny Crosby wrote more than 8,000 songs. This fact and other interesting highlights in the life of Miss Crosby were revealed by Warren Wiersbe in his book *Victorious Christian*. Wiersbe explained that when Fanny was only 6 weeks old a minor eye inflammation developed. The doctor who treated the case was careless, though, and she became totally and permanently blind.

Fanny Crosby harbored no bitterness against the physician, however. In fact, she once said of him, "If I could meet him now, I would say thank you, over and over again for making me blind." She felt that her blindness was a gift from God to help her write the hymns that flowed from her pen. According to those who knew her, Miss Crosby probably would have refused treatment even if it could have assured the restoration of her sight.

Wiersbe concluded by commenting: "It was said of another blind hymn writer, George Matheson, that God made him blind so he could see clearly in other ways and become a guide to men. This same tribute could be applied to Fanny Crosby, who triumphed over her handicap and used it to the glory of God." Yes, this talented woman allowed her tragedy to make her better instead of bitter.^{xiv}

1:3 - THE TESTING OF YOUR FAITH. “...*Knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.*” There is a reason Christian, you should “consider it all joy” when you encounter trials (vs. 2) - “because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance” (NRSV). The child of God must see every trial to which he is subjected as a test of his faith. You know this because God says so in His Word, you know it through observation of others, but the knowledge here is experiential knowledge, not intellectual discernment.

Since Christians have not been openly persecuted in America for many generations, it is easy to consign this subject to an earlier period of Christian history. When we think of the trials we face as believers today we may think of the challenges all people face on a regular basis; getting a job, seeking a promotion, the risk of losing a job, family problems, aging, illness or disability. These are legitimate trials the Christian must face along with everyone else. There are trials that come suddenly to Christians and non-Christians alike. For example, in the winter of 2001 the gas bill for heating homes escalated quickly to the point that many people received gas bills that were more than their monthly income. In addition, newspapers carried headlines about the stock market that included words like “plunge” and “crumble.” Those approaching retirement are facing a serious time of testing, and that at a time when options are limited. It is a challenge to face such trials with a sense of joy, yet that is exactly what the Scripture says we should do.

There are trials that are peculiar to Christians, especially to Christians who take a stand of social and moral issues. A teacher is harassed when she sets a tiny nativity scene on her desk. A student is suspended for taking Bible to school. An employee is passed over for a promotion because he will not go to bars with the regional vice-president of the company.

We are beginning to see a sustained resistance to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the exercise of faith in America. History books have been rewritten to obliterate the role of Christianity in the founding of America. The Founding Fathers are misrepresented in such a way that children in public schools cannot possibly discover their deep faith in Jesus Christ and commitment to the Word of God.

The ACLU watches Christians like a hawk, lest a revival break out in the market place - or a prayer at a football game or commencement exercise in a public school. One popular liberal attorney exclaimed in a debate with William F. Buckley, Jr., "We are not against religion, we just want it practiced where it is supposed to be, in the home and in the church." That is just the problem. Christianity was never intended to be confined to the home and church building. Evangelicals must take the Gospel into the market place, out to the highways and by-ways, the hedgerows of the world. This effort is being met with greater resistance as we move deeper and deeper into the post-Christian period in America.

During the 1960's, I made the statement that if we proclaim the Gospel faithfully, people will either follow us or persecute us. I said at the time that the tragedy of Christianity in America at the time was no one was following us, and no one was persecuting us. They are simply ignoring us. Well, they are no longer ignoring us! But today there is open opposition to evangelical Christianity today in America. That opposition has not broken out in open persecution of believers, but in persistent and sustained resistance, criticism, cynicism, and discrimination.

Christians are being persecuted around the world today and that persecution is being ignored by Christians in America. Furthermore, those who are concerned about it cannot get the attention of the of those who may be in a position to do something about it. This was particularly true of the Clinton White House. David Aikman ("Rescue to the Christians," *The American Spectator*, July, 1996, pp 22-24, 82) discusses the efforts of a Jewish attorney to bring the persecution of Christians around the world to the attention of the State Department, the White House, and even the National Council of Churches. He asks, "Why is the White House ignoring the growing persecution of Christians worldwide?" "The rise of Islamic fundamentalism," Michael J. Horowitz says, "has effectively criminalized the practice of Christianity."^{xv} Horowitz sent letters to 143 Christian leaders. "It does seem to me," he wrote, "that America's missions may have a special role in breaking the silence now surrounding the persecutions."^{xvi} Aikman continues:

Silence, he warned, was not an option, since it was reminiscent of pre-World War II warnings by some American Jewish leaders not to "provoke" Hitler by publicly defying him. Indeed, Horowitz warned, though one could not yet speak of an actual holocaust against Christians, the silence of the American Christian community and "the indifference of elites towards these groups" provided "eerie parallels" to the global indifference to the plight of Europe's Jews.^{xvii}

The article describes some of the persecutions of Christians around the world. They include arrests, beatings, torture, and selling into slavery Christians who resist Islamicization. If we do not pray for these suffering saints and ask our government to help them as they do others persecuted groups, the persecution could escalate around the world. Eventually, we could see persecution of Christians in America - at the least we may see a lackadaisical attitude on the part of those in power toward the abuse of and opposition to Christians.

If opposition increases and persecution comes to America, how will Christians face these trials? We must pray that we will avoid such trials, but if forced to face them, we must face them with all joy, knowing that the trying of our faith will produce endurance and steadfastness. Can you say with Tertullian, "The more you persecute us, the more we grow; the blood of blood of the martyred is the seed of the church."

ENDURANCE. The NKJV follows the KJV in translating the word "patience." Endurance is a better translation because it conveys the idea of steadfastness. The result of facing trials and overcoming them is steadfastness. In modern usage the word patience might suggest that you have enough self control to count to ten before you blow your stack over some pet peeve. This is a desirable quality, but the idea here is that victory over trials will produce maturity, stability, and strength. The faith that overcomes trials is not to be denied; it knows no defeat, no compromise, no surrender.

This points to a positive action and not a negative resignation to circumstances. It is active, not passive. The faith that faces and overcomes trials is not to be denied a victory. We need to reach the point that we can accept the fact that we will be able to face the trials we encounter with joy rather than fear and anxiety. Trials put genuine faith, "and all the graces of which it is composed to proof; the man that stands in such trials gives proof that his religion is sound, and the evidence afforded to his own mind induces him to take courage, bear patiently, and persevere."^{xviii}

1:4 - LET ENDURANCE HAVE ITS PERFECT RESULT. "*And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*" Compare the NAS with the NKJV: "But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." As Christians we can face the trials of life with "all joy" (vs. 2) because we are assured of victory by the grace of God, and because we know that every victory produces greater endurance, or steadfastness. Just as physical exercise produces added strength and stamina, the exercise of faith will produce greater strength and endurance.

The word "perfect," does not denote sinless perfection, but an increasing maturity. The words "complete, lacking nothing," provide us with an excellent, if brief, commentary on the word "perfect" as used here. Victory over trials develops steadfastness (endurance, stability), and steadfastness develops spiritual maturity. In the words of a popular gospel song, "He's Still Working On Me" to produce such maturity that I will be "complete, lacking nothing."

If a believer meets trials in the manner prescribed by Scripture, if day by day he experiences

victory over these trials, then each day he will become more mature and more Christlike. This is true Sanctification: “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son...” (Rom. 8:29).

Whether the trials we face come to us as a result of the directive will of God, or by the permissive will of God, we may face them with a sense of abiding joy. Warren Wiersbe expresses it so well.

The experiences that come to the children of God are not by accident (Rom. 8:28). We have a loving Heavenly Father who controls the affairs of this world and who has a purpose behind each event. Christians should expect trials to come; James does not say “if” but “when.” (The Gk. word for “temptation” in 1:2 means “testings or trials”; while the Gk. word for “tempt” in 1:13 means “solicitation to do evil.”) What is God’s purpose in trials? It is the perfection of Christian character in His children. He wants His children to be mature (perfect), and maturity is developed only in the laboratory of life. Trials can produce patience (see Rom. 5:3), which means “endurance”; and endurance in turn leads the believer into deeper maturity in Christ.

xix

B. Resources for Meeting the Trials of Life, 1:5-8.

1:5 - WISDOM. *“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”* Wisdom is an indispensable resource for the Christian in overcoming the trials of life. Wisdom is more than simple knowledge or the accumulation of facts. It involves knowledge, experience, discernment, faith to meet adversity. “With James, wisdom is the right use of one’s opportunities in holy living” [ATR].^{xx} Adam Clarke notes that “Wisdom signifies in general knowledge of the best end, and the best means of attaining it; but in Scripture it signifies the same as true religion, the thorough practical knowledge of God, of one’s self, and of a Savior.”^{xxi}

LET HIM ASK OF GOD. He is the source of strength and wisdom - the source of all of our resources. He is a generous and loving Father, Who is ready to give us everything we need to experience victory over trials that are sure to come. We must ask God, Who “gives to all (believers) generously and without reproach,” to give us the wisdom to meet the normal tests of faith that come to all believers, as well as those special trials. We should even pray for the wisdom to know the difference between the two.

General Eisenhower is quoted as saying, "The urgent is seldom important, and the important is seldom urgent." Too often life is controlled by the "tyranny of the urgent". We put aside higher and more worthy goals to put out fires. Let's evaluate the importance of all of our daily activities to be sure we're not victims of the "Tyranny of the Urgent."^{xxii}

WITHOUT REPROACH. God does not hold our past sins and current failures against us, just

as He does not refuse to give us what we ask for simply because He knows what we will do with it in the future.

When Solomon asked for wisdom, God gave him more than he asked for, even though he was aware of how Solomon would abuse it. The Jews pray: "May I never need to rely on the gifts of men whose resentful attitudes are not worth the trouble of their puny gifts, but give me from your bountiful supply." James must have been thinking of the Sermon on the Mount here. God responds to every genuine request, either by giving what we ask, or else giving something that is much better for us in the long run.^{xxiii}

1:6 - ASK IN FAITH. *"But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind."* Jesus taught, "...whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matt. 21:22, NKJV). James says when we need faith to deal with the trials of life we must "ask in faith." Wisdom is essential if we are to overcome the adversities which test our faith, but we must not confuse this wisdom with academic degrees, knowledge gleaned from books in various disciplines, or conclusions drawn from our observations. It is a wisdom which only God can supply. And it is a wisdom He will supply when we ask believing. Faith is not believing God can do it, faith is believing God will do it.

WITHOUT ANY DOUBTING. "For the one who doubts," he adds, "is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind." The KJV has, "nothing wavering." The doubter is always vacillating between belief and unbelief (see Rom. 4:20). I like the NKJV: "for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind." In either, we see the metaphor of a wind tossed sea. What could be more unstable than a wave of the sea. Surfers watch the waves to find a good one to ride. They know it is going toward the shore, but they are always aware that they cannot always predict how it will break.

The Christian who prays doubting is like a wave of the sea. Doubt produces the opposite of steadfastness - instability. In Genesis 49:3-4, Jacob refused the blessing of the first born son to Reuben because he was "unstable as water." Because he was unstable the Patriarch reasoned, "Thou shalt not excel."

What we are witnessing in the church today bears this out. We have a generation of people who have grown up on television and movies, and recreation. When it comes to church, they do not want to be fed and they do not want to minister - they want to be entertained. A large percentage of those who are "in church" are inconsistent in attendance and support. They tell you they are in church and that they "go to church," and they see no conflict in saying that even if they only attend morning services once or twice a month.

The "baby boomers" are looking for a cafeteria style church in which they can pick and choose from all the various activities. The wife of a denominational worker visited, with her family, many churches in large city with a heavy concentration of churches. She concluded that the baby boomers and the so called "baby busters" (age 18-30) who do not choose a church because the Bible

is preached and taught there; they are looking for a gym. Baby boomers, according to one report, change churches once every five years. If their parents had moved their membership to a new church, it might have been because of a major conflict in the church, or because they did not like the pastor. For the baby boomers no conflict is necessary, and they may “like the pastor.” They simply see something they like at another church, the music, a children’s program, their teenager wants to go where his friends are, or a new building. There is no sense of responsibility, no deep commitment, and the church must be aware of this in planning services, building programs, and new ministries. One pastor lamented, “You don’t build a church around them.” Fortunately, there are some notable exceptions among them, but these characteristics point to some of the problems the church is having in post-Christian America.

Abraham was called the friend of God and the “father of the faithful,” because “...with respect to the promise of God, *he did not waver in unbelief* but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God” (Rom. 4:20), NKJV, italics added). Victory over distress and difficulties is assured those who ask believing. There is an old adage: when you ask, believe and you will receive; ask in doubt and do without.

1:7 - THAT MAN OUGHT NOT TO EXPECT. “*For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord.*” By “that man” he means the doubter. It is understandable that one would doubt the ability, or the potential of man, but how can a believer doubt the omnipotent God? The absurdity of doubting God is illustrated by the following statements taken from official documents, newspapers and magazines widely read during their day. Listen to what the “authorities” had to say:

1840 - "Anyone traveling at the speed of thirty miles per hour would surely suffocate."

1878 - "Electric lights are unworthy of serious attention."

1901 - "No possible combination can be united into a practical machine by which men shall fly."

1926 - (from a scientist) "This foolish idea of shooting at the moon is basically impossible."

1930 - (another scientist) "To harness the energy locked up in matter is impossible."^{xxiv}

It is amusing, if understandable, that at the time so-called experts doubted the potential of human achievement, but it is somewhat bewildering that a professing believer would doubt Almighty God.

1:8 - A DOUBLE MINDED MAN. The doubter, “*being a double-minded man,*” is predictably “*unstable in all his ways.*” In verses 5-8, James deals with faith as it is expressed in prayer. We do not always understand God’s purposes, and often Satan tempts us to ask, “Does God really care?” This is where prayer comes in: we can ask our Father for wisdom, and He will give it to us. But we must not be double-minded. The word suggests hesitation, doubting; it literally means “two-souled.” Double-minded Christians are not stable during trials. Their emotions and their decisions waver. One minute they trust God; the next minute, they doubt God. Faith in God during trials will always lead to stability; see 1 Peter 5:10.

C. The Rich Poor and the Poor Rich, 1:9-11.

1:9 - THE BROTHER OF HUMBLE CIRCUMSTANCES. *“But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position.”* The NRSV reads, “Let the believer who is lowly boast in being raised up.” Wiersbe comments:

Both rich and poor worshiped in the assemblies to which James wrote (2:1-9; 5:1), and James pointed out that trials benefit both groups. Trials remind the poor that they are rich in the Lord and therefore can lose nothing; trials remind the rich that they dare not live for riches or trust in them..^{xxv}

This section deals with the trials of both the rich and the poor, to show that God is concerned enough to expose both of them to trials. Both may know the great joy James desires for his brethren. God does not discriminate on the basis of material possessions, social position, or political power. Believers from all socioeconomic brackets will have their faith tested so that God can nurture and develop them to maturity.

It is important to point out that the poor do not receive the blessings of the Lord simply because of difficulties associated with poverty. Nor will the rich be denied His blessings because of the pleasures or advantages of wealth. “They are all, rich and poor, one in Christ - all are miserable sinners saved by the grace of God.”^{xxvi} The ground really is level at the foot of the cross. All must depend upon Jesus both for Justification and for Sanctification. There are many potential pitfalls for the rich and the poor and God is concerned for both. It is His desire that the rich and the poor have the right attitude toward their own circumstances as well as their attitude toward each other.

1:10 - THE RICH MAN. *“And the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away.”* Just as the poor man is to glory in being raised up by the glory of God, the rich man is “to glory in his humiliation.” The incentive is the realization that, “like flowering grass he will pass away.” The metaphor was a familiar one to those who knew the Scripture: “As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, And its place remembers it no more” (Ps. 103:15-16, NKJV). Only in Christ does the rich person do this.

The Scripture does not promote class envy. Class envy has become a well worn political tool in America. But however effective it may be in getting votes for a particular political party, it is still a Marxist in philosophy and evil in nature.

1:11 - THE SUN RISES WITH A SCORCHING WIND. *“For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.”* The Palestinian Jew would appreciate the metaphor. They had seen plains, green with grass and sprinkled with flowering plants, scorched and seared when the hot east wind suddenly swept in from the desert and baked the land. The Jewish readers were also familiar with Isaiah 40: 8: “The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.” The rich in all their glory were just that vulnerable.

II. BELIEVERS ARE ASSURED OF VICTORY, 1:12-27.

A. The Crown of Life, 1:12.

1:12 - BLESSED IS A MAN. *“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him...”* This great verse begins with a wonderful beatitude and ends with a glorious promise (which actually is a part of the beatitude). He begins this section by declaring, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials” (vs. 2) and then he proceeded to explain why we should count it all joy when we face the various trials of life: the testing of one’s faith will produce steadfastness (endurance in NAS; patience, KJV) and when steadfastness will lead to maturity.

ONCE HE HAS BEEN APPROVED. Who is to be blessed? It is the one who has passed the tests of life successfully by the grace of God. With what will he be blessed? “He will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” And what is the crown of life? It is life itself - eternal life. However, at this point we should stress that eternal life does not come as a result of suffering. We are saved “by grace, through faith” (Eph. 2:8). The emphasis here is not on how lost people are saved, but on living that life victoriously.

CROWN OF LIFE. The crown of life is the most important blessing and the greatest reward a believer can receive. There are other rewards for believers, based upon their faithfulness in the service of the Savior. Paul wrote that:

each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Cor.3:13-15).

In commenting on 1 Cor. 3:14, Ryrie observes that:

Salvation is a free gift, but rewards, for those who are saved, are earned. The quality of our service (v. 13) is the criterion. Rewards are often spoken of as crowns (cf. 9:25; 1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4; Rev. 2:10; 3:11; 4:4, 10).^{xxvii}

The word crown appears fifty nine times in the NAS, usually denoting a literal crown, but occasionally it is used figuratively. Only here and in Rev. 2:10 does the Scripture mention the crown of life.

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days.

Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life (Rev. 2:10).

B. The Source of Temptations, 1:13-15.

1:13 - LET NO ONE SAY WHEN HE IS TEMPTED. *“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.”* We must distinguish between trials that are designed to prove us and temptations that are designed to hurt us. The word translated “tempted” can mean to test or prove the quality of one’s character (1:2, 12), or it may denote the solicitation to commit evil, as here. Warren Wiersbe’s commentary is right on target:

Many people seem to have the idea that because God is good, He should not allow His people to suffer or be tempted. They forget that God wants His children to grow up and experience new blessings of His grace; and one way they can mature is by going through trials and temptations. In this passage, James emphasizes the goodness of God and warns Christians about rebelling against God in times of trial (1:13, 20).

First, he makes a careful distinction between trials and temptations. God sends trials to bring out the best in us (see Abraham, Gen. 22:1), but Satan sends temptations to bring out the worst in us^{xxviii}.

When you buy a child a bike you know he is going to get a few bruises and abrasions while learning to ride it, but what child wants to grow up without riding a bike? Parents are often a little nervous when their child is taking swimming lessons, but what parent would not want his or her child to be able to swim? My family had a friend who tried to save someone else’s life when a boat capsized. He pushed the friend into vines and saved her life, but in doing so he pushed himself back into the current where he drowned. He had never learned to swim.

We must be clear about this point: when you are tempted to sin, and you will be tempted, you must never say, “I am being tempted by God.” The trials which are designed to test our faith, and thus strengthen and develop us, may come as a result of God’s permissive will, or they may come as a result of His directive will. But the temptation to sin, which is designed trip us up, can never be attributed to a holy God.

GOD CANNOT BE TEMPTED BY EVIL. God is absolutely holy, which means that there is nothing in His nature that would respond to any temptation - He cannot be tempted by those things that tempt human beings. Students of Scripture often speak of the various attributes of God: He is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent; God is love the list goes on and on. Perhaps the one attribute most neglected by many is his holiness. All believers will someday stand before the throne of God, singing, “...HOLY, HOLY, HOLY IS THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME” (Rev. 4:8b).

HE HIMSELF DOES NOT TEMPT ANYONE. Scripture teaches this and logic supports it.

A Holy God, Who cannot be tempted, surely cannot tempt others to sin, for solicitation to sin is sin, and God cannot sin.

1:14 - EACH ONE IS TEMPTED. *“But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.”* Since temptation to sin cannot come from God, and since all sin is rebellion against God, it must come from the enemy of God. As a matter of fact, Scripture teaches that there are **three sources of temptation**: Satan, the world, and the flesh.

1. **THE FLESH** - “For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin” (Rom. 7:14).

2. **THE WORLD** - “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

3. **SATAN** - “Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil” (Eph. 6:11).

ENTICED BY HIS OWN LUST. God cannot tempt man to sin and Satan cannot force him to sin, “But each one is tempted when he is carried away and *enticed by his own lust.*” The words “drawn away” and “entice” (v. 14) are hunting terms; they form an image of a hunter or a fisherman using bait to lure the prey.^{xxix} A famous comedian used to explain any mistake by saying, “The devil made me do it.” People across America were mimicking “The devil made me do it.” They said it in jest, but if any one tries to excuse himself by blaming God or the devil, he does not know the Scripture. The emphasis here is on the fact that temptations do not come from God but from man's own inner lust.

As we have already seen, the three sources of temptation are Satan, the flesh, and the world, yet we see here that when we sin it is because we are enticed by our own lust. The individual's own lust is the fertile soil into which the flesh, the world, and Satan sow seeds of destruction. This means that when we stand before the judgment bar of God we cannot justify our sins by saying that “the devil made me do it”; the flesh was too strong for me; or the world overwhelmed me.

1:15 - WHEN LUST HAS CONCEIVED. *“Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”* The source of temptation is lust in the heart of fallen man. When that lust is not resisted, it gives birth to sin, and it follows that “when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.” God permits our faith to be put to the test, but temptation to sin comes from within. There is something within each person, including the believer, that is responsive to the world and to Satan. The responsibility for man's sin rests squarely upon his own shoulders, not upon God. The progression is as shocking as it is true: lust leads to sin and sin leads to death (Gen. 3:6-22). A translation shows vividly the most vivid expressions of the progressive stages and

the tragedy of sin to be found in the Scriptures: “Desire, having conceived, continually gives birth to sin, and sin, when it reaches maturity, continually gives birth to death.”^{xxx}

The Christian should not say that God tempts him to sin, because the temptation to sin arises from our very nature. James describes the source and path of sin.

First, enticement from without generates lust within.

Second, lust, when it conceives and gives birth to sin.

Third, sin brings death!

TEMPTATION >DESIRE >SIN >DEATH

C. The Reason for the Gifts of God, 1:16-18.

1:16 - DO NOT BE DECEIVED. *“Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.”* Deceit is as alien to the nature of God as sin and temptation (13-15), so if they are deceived, God is not the source of the deceit. If He is not the source, who is? Satan is the great deceiver, but we can be deceived by others and there is such a thing as self-deceit. Whatever the source, it is not to be desired.

MY BELOVED BRETHERN. The Bible student senses that James’ use of “my beloved brethren” was significant. They were living in the early, budding stages of the church. They, literally, they were a New Testament church without a New Testament. Many were new converts with no knowledge of systematic theology, so the possibility of their being deceived was very real. As a key leader of the Christian movement, James is deeply concerned about these Jewish believers. He identifies with them and assures them of his love for them. There are two areas of concern; one is doctrinal integrity and the other is their personal relationship with the Lord.

1:17 - EVERY GOOD THING GIVEN. *“Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.”*

All good things “and every perfect gift is from above.” All good things come from above - only good things come from above. The Scriptures teach

“There is no one who does good” (Ps. 53:1b).

“But as for me, the nearness of God is my good” (Ps. 73:28).

“For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly” (Ps. 84:11).

“Praise the LORD! Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good” (Ps 106:1).

Paul wrote, “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want” (Rom. 7:18-19).

FATHER OF LIGHTS. It was God Who said, “Let there be light.” Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.” God is the source of all light, whether physical, intellectual, or spiritual.

WITH WHOM THERE IS NO VARIATION. The Father of Lights, our Heavenly Father, is the changeless God of eternity. Immutability is one of the basic attributes of Almighty God. In Him there is “no variation or shadow of turning” NKJV). The NAS has “shifting shadow.” These Jewish readers would remember the words of Malachi: “For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Mal. 3:6). Whatever we may say of the Father we must say of the Son: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

1:18 - IN THE EXERCISE OF HIS WILL. “*In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.*” Every believer should be as concerned with the will of God as were James and Paul.

1. In Romans 8:27, the Holy Spirit “intercedes for the saints *according to the will of God.*”
2. In Rom 12:2, we find that “you may prove *what the will of God is.*”
3. In Rom. 15:32, Paul expressed the desire: “that I may come to you in joy *by the will of God.*”
4. 1 Cor 1:1, we find that Paul was “called as an apostle of Jesus Christ *by the will of God.*”
5. In 2 Cor. 7:10, we find that “the sorrow that is *according to the will of God* produces a repentance without regret.”
6. In James 4:15, we find that before making plans “you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.”

HE BROUGHT US FORTH. God, as our Father “brought us forth” (“begat” in KJV). The Greek word means to bring forth by birth. God is responsible both for our physical birth, and our spiritual birth. The will of God is the cause of our regeneration.

BY THE WORD OF TRUTH. Our Lord, the Father of Lights, brought us forth by means of the gospel message (the Word of truth).

FIRST FRUITS. Among the early readers of this epistle were many Jews who could relate to this. There are 25 references to “first fruits” in the OT. They knew the Law.

1. You shall bring the choice *first fruits* of your soil into the house of the LORD your God” (Ex. 23:19, italics added).
2. "You shall celebrate the Feast of Weeks, that is, the *first fruits* of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year” (Ex. 34:22, italics added).

They were the “first fruits among His creatures” (or, new beings). “These first believers, largely Jewish in background, were the guarantee of a fuller harvest of believers to come.”^{xxxix}

D. Doers of the Word, 1:19-27.

1:19 - THIS YOU KNOW, MY BELOVED BRETHREN. *“This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.”* They were well aware of the source of their salvation (vs. 18). They knew it because they were children of God, therefore and as such, brethren in Christ. Only those whom God has brought forth by “the word of truth” are brothers and sisters in Christ. Awareness of this led Southern Baptists to change their salute to the Christian flag. Formerly the pledge was: “I pledge allegiance to the Christian flag, and to the Savior for Whose kingdom it stands.” So far, so good, but then we used the words; “one brotherhood uniting all mankind in service and love.” The words we now use are, “one brotherhood uniting all Christians in service and love.” Only believers are a part in the family of God.

QUICK TO HEAR. Christians must be quick to hear and obey the Word of God. Being quick to hear has nothing to do with how quickly one can grasp abstract thoughts or theological principles. The meaning is to give immediate attention, to listen with interest, and to apply that which he hears. The OT prophets used a word which meant to hear with a mind to obey, and that is the idea here. This is the theme of this section: We must be “doers of the word and not hearers only” (vs. 22).

SLOW TO SPEAK. He does not say that we are to be slow in speech, or dull of speech. The mature Christian will wait until he is sure what he has to say is within the framework of the will of God.

SLOW TO ANGER. Literally, it is slow to wrath. We must be slow to enter into heated dispute or arguments, slow to attack others, careful to avoid words that encourage bitterness and strife. There is a clear connection between anger and speech. Either can greatly effect the other. “If men would govern their tongues, they must govern their passions. The worst thing we can bring to any dispute, is anger.”^{xxxix}

When I was a student at Mississippi College, I took a number of classes under Dr. R. R. Pierce, Head of the Department of Sociology. Once during a rather heated debate, he listened

quietly but with an expression of amusement for some time. Then, without a word, he turned to the chalk board and wrote two words: Light and Heat. He waited for those of us who were caught in the heat of debate to discover what he had written and when there was absolute silence, he asked, “What are you throwing on the subject, light or heat?”

1:20 - FOR THE ANGER OF MAN. “*For the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.*” We are often warned of the danger of anger. There is an interesting comment in *The Preacher’s Homiletic Commentary* (Vol 29) on this subject: It is difficult for us to realize the suddenness, unreasonableness, and intensity of anger in Eastern countries, and, perhaps we may say, even especially among the Jews.”^{xxxiii} Referring to NT times, another writer observed: “The besetting sin of the Jews was to identify their own anger against what seemed sin and heresy with the will of God; to think that they did God a service by deeds of violence, and that they were those working out righteousness.”^{xxxiv}

Whether anger was a greater problem to the Eastern countries than Western countries in an earlier generation may be open to debate, but there is one thing for sure - we are catching up! When in his inaugural address, President George Bush called for a “kinder, gentler America, a lot of people in the media responded as if he had suddenly become senile.

We should be “slow to anger” (vs. 19) because our anger “does not achieve the righteousness of God.” It will greatly hinder our testimony. A Christian attorney talked with me about my youngest brother, who is also an attorney. He said, “the first time I had a case with Mike I noticed that he has a way of diffusing tension. I am aggressive and I create a lot of tension, but he has a way of diffusing it. I mentioned it to another lawyer and asked him if he had noticed it. I told him I thought it was because he is a Christian and I made up my mind that I was going to ask him the next time I saw him. I was pleased to learn that he is a Christian.” He was convinced that Mike was a Christian because his speech was under control and he had a way of diffusing tension. Others may be judging us on the same basis.

Thomas Sowell often writes columns under the general caption, “Random Thoughts on the Passing Scene.” I would like to express some random thoughts on the subject of anger. I do not know a quicker or more certain way to call one’s faith into question than for him to lose his temper and lashing out at another person. When I was a youth my very spiritually perceptive mother expressed her concern that my anger would be a major obstacle to the ministry to which I had been called at the ripe old age of thirteen. It might not have been as effective if she had simply lectured me about my anger, which often manifested in a stubborn determination to “talk back” to her. Most of this was already behind me, but I could recall as a ten year old getting both a switching and a severe lecture. In my mind either was enough - more than I wanted, especially after I had been sent to the orchard for a switch from a peach tree. I knew I had the “whipping” coming, but when she began “fussing” at me it was as though I had to say something back or die. I said it, and for my effort got my second switching of the day. Mine always came in pairs.

Then one day Mother sent me to the orchard for a switch, and I brought back a limb, at least seven feet long. I knew she would not use that on me, and she didn't. Now I had her number! So the next time I did the same thing and, once again her heart was crushed at the thought that I would think she would use such a limb on me. Then she figured it out! The next time I provoked her we were in the back yard under those big oak trees, near one of our cotton fields and near a neighbor's field.

I returned from the orchard with a thick limb that had to be eight feet long and handed it to my mother. She simply "choked up" on it - caught it in the middle - and used the tip end to give me a few "licks" with it. After the second swat I screamed and yelled as loud as I could. Mother looked up and the neighbors who were picking cotton not too far away had all turned and there she stood holding me by my left arm with her left hand, and in her right hand the big limb. It was a long time before she got over the embarrassment - and I loved it.

How was my anger controlled? By a father whose yea meant yea and whose nay meant nay. There were no communication gaps between Joe B. Sanders and his stubborn ten or twelve year old son. I understood him perfectly. But what about my mother's concern about my anger? How could I overcome the problem? When she expressed her concern that it would hinder my ministry, I took it to the Lord and asked Him to give me a victory over that which would have defeated his purpose in calling me. On many occasions I have been amazed at how I listened to something that I did not especially enjoy, but I had no problem walking away without saying anything. There have been other times when I talked with someone who was offensive, and I carefully controlled my tongue. When I was alone with Becky, I shared with her the irritation I had felt. I also discovered that a sharp retort might let you "let off steam", but it has a tendency to escalate tension and strife, and acerbate the parties involved. Embittered individuals often use their tongue to fuel the controversy.

When I was in college and seminary, I worked each summer for the Quitman County (MS) Agricultural, Stabilization, and Conservation Service (ASCS). One day I was sent to a farm no one else wanted to work to measure a "plow-up". The farmer had planted to many acres and had to plow up all over his allotment. Many farmers deliberately planted over their allotment, knowing that they could plow up weak spots, a low place where cotton had drowned in a wet year, or a knoll where it had suffered from the drought in a dry year. The only problem was that some of these people could hardly bring themselves to plow up good cotton, even when they knew they had over planted.

On this particular day I found Mr. White (not his real name, though I am tempted!) in his pickup truck, watching his hands working in a field. I introduced myself and asked for someone to pull the chain (a sixty-six foot chain we used to measure the acreage). He drove to another field and picked up a man and brought him back to me. The large young man shook hands with me when I introduced myself. As we moved from one place to another, I made several attempts at conversation, but his answers were always brief and it seemed that he was not interested in talking with me. At one point I told him that his last name was familiar to me. When I asked about his family I discovered that we knew many of the same people, and that some of his relatives were friends of mine. After that my new friend opened up and we enjoyed conversations as we stopped

after a measurement. Finally, the man said, “You are not at all like Mr. White said you would be.” Surprised, I asked, “What do you mean?”

“He said you were a hot headed, a smart aleck. That you were overbearing. Bad to fight.”

“That’s almost exactly what he told me about you!”

We had a good laugh, understanding that Mr. White wanted to see, at the very least, an argument. But we figured he would have enjoyed it a lot more if he could have started a fight on his place. In the first place, as Mr. White would learn in time, I represented the ASCS. I had the authority of the US Government behind me and I did not have to argue with him. He had to cooperate with me if he wanted to get his card that would allow him to sell his cotton. In the second place, I did not blame a farmer for not wanting to plow up his cotton. Someone was measuring our cotton over in Tunica County. I understood that Mr. White was trying to generate anger which could not benefit him in any way. He was simply an angry man who wanted to stir up trouble for others.

1:21 - PUTTING ASIDE ALL FILTHINESS. *“Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.”* Many Bible students are more familiar with the KJV: *“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls”* (italics added). Compare that with the NRSV: *Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls”* (italics added).

The word translated “filthiness” denotes moral corruption and filth commonly associated with the life of sin. This is “an exhortation to lay apart, and to cast off as a filthy garment, all sinful practices. This must reach to sins of thought and affection, as well as of speech and practice; to every thing corrupt and sinful.”^{xxxv}

ALL THAT REMAINS OF WICKEDNESS. The KJV has “superfluity of naughtiness.” It “can be translated ‘rank growth of wickedness’—weeds! The soil of the heart must be prepared to receive the Word. If we have unconfessed sin in our hearts, and bitterness against God because of our trials, then we cannot receive the Word and be blessed by it.”^{xxxvi}

IN HUMILITY. Unfortunately, humility is not seen as a virtue by those who are into self-worth, self-esteem, self-love, and human potential. A Christian student in a nearby university showed me a resume’ he had prepared for a business English class. It was a very impressive resume’ but he received a “B” on the project. The resume’ was well done, but the teacher explained that he was too humble. The Bible places extraordinary emphasis on the important of humility.

A man's pride will bring him low, But the humble in spirit will retain honor (Pro. 29:23, NKJV).

Exalt the humble, and humble the exalted (Eze. 21:26b, NKJV).

"God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6b, NKJV).

RECEIVE THE WORD IMPLANTED. The Word of God is to be received in such a way that it is "implanted," or "engrafted" (KJV), joined to the character of the inner person so as to become a living part of him. As we have seen in verse 18, we are born again by the grace of God through faith in the Gospel. Now we are told that the Word of God is implanted to aid our in our Christian growth and development.

1:22 - DOERS OF THE WORD. *"But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves."* How unfortunate it is that some have read these words and concluded that the Epistle of James advocates a works righteousness (Luther called it an epistle of straw). James is writing to believers who have already been born again (vs. 18) to emphasize how important it is for Christians to be obedient to their Lord; to manifest their faith through their works.

There is no conflict between James and Paul on this subject. One who objects might point out that Paul wrote that we are saved by grace through faith, and not of works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Yes, Paul did write that and it is totally consistent with every thing he wrote in all his epistles, especially the great discussion of Justification in Romans. But we must read the rest of what he wrote in Ephesians 2:10: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (NKJV).

There is more: James, in essence, is saying "But (Christians) prove yourselves (demonstrate you faith by being) "doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves." Who knows if a "hearer" has responded to the Word of God? Do they doubt Him? Have they rejected Him? Are they ashamed of Him? If a person will not confess Him by making a public profession of faith and following Him in believer's baptism and then confess their faith through obedience and good works, how are we to know they are His? We can only judge the doer, no one can judge a mere hearer. If he thinks it is enough to be a hearer, he is deceiving himself. He is not deceiving God and he not deceiving too many others. Matthew Henry wrote:

Mere hearers are self-deceivers; and self-deceit will be found the worst deceit at last. If we flatter ourselves, it is our own fault; the truth, as it is in Jesus, flatters no man. Let the word of truth be carefully attended to, and it will set before us the corruption of our nature, the disorders of our hearts and lives; and it will tell us plainly what we are.^{xxxvii}

It should be stated here that there "hearers" of the Word of God who are not hypocrites in the

sense that they are deliberately trying to convince people they are something other than what they are. They are self-deceived hearers who have convinced themselves that they are “all right” with God. However, the hearer who fail to follow Jesus Christ and produce the fruit of righteousness are deluding themselves. Their disobedience betrays them. If they spend much time in the Scripture and are open the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, He will reveal the truth to them.. But many will stand before the Lord “in that day” and offer the excuse, “I was baptized,” or, “I belonged to the church,” or “I did a lot of good works.” These people have deceived themselves.

I attended Mississippi College when we had a Bible Department. Now all of our schools have a Religion Department. I have often wondered if the name change reflected a difference in the way some people in some of our Christians schools looked at the Bible. Once when Dr. E. R. Pinson was lecturing on the relationship between faith and works he made a statement that I have often quoted. He knew I was not working as hard as I should have, but I doubt that he knew how carefully I listened to him. In this particular lecture he said, “**Wind is not wind unless it is blowing, and faith is not faith unless it is working.**”

A saving faith is a working faith. A sanctifying faith is a working faith. One cannot keep discipleship a secret. Either the secret destroys the discipleship, or the discipleship destroys the secret. We must prove ourselves “doers of the Word”, not just hearers.

1:23 - A MIRROR. *“For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror.”* In 22-25, the author changes the picture and compares the Word of God to a mirror. The Word of God reveals what we are on the inside, just as a mirror reveals how we appear on the outside. “When Christians look into the Word, they see themselves as God sees them and thus are able to examine their hearts and confess their sins.”^{xxxviii}

But we must not stop there, because it is not enough to look simply into the Word (read it); we must obey it. One who only hears the Word but does not obey it is like a person who glances quickly into a mirror, sees that his face is dirty or that he needs a hair cut, but goes on his way without doing anything about it. Such a person thinks he may forget that he has not improved himself,

and is so doing he invites criticism. I once made a toothpick out a plastic drinking straw. After breakfast one Sunday morning I stuck this plastic straw behind my ear before brushing my teeth. I looked into the mirror, saw the plastic straw and made a mental note to remove it when I went back into the bedroom to dress. I forgot all about it until a lady said. “I hate to mention it, but is there something behind your ear?”

1:24 - FOR. *“for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.”* The contrast in verses 23-25 is a simple enough. There is a problem with being a mere hearer of the Word of God. The hearer is like a careless person looks in a mirror and forgets what he sees whereas the sincere person looks into the Word of God and takes some action based upon what he sees. The Scripture has “like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror.”

Ryrie observes that “The word for man is "male" and indicates that men, in contrast to women, who are more sensitive by nature, need this exhortation to careful observance of what they see in the Word.”^{xxxix}

1:25 - THE PERFECT LAW. *“But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.”* There are things only the serious student of the Word of God will comprehend. The person who glances at himself in a mirror may notice that his hair is disheveled, but if he walks away without brushing it he soon forgets that it needs attention (vs. 23). The person who gives the Word of God a cursory look and the goes on about his way will neither comprehend it, not apply it in his daily life. The Scripture is as clear as it is consequential, as discernible as it is applicable. It affirms that the person “who looks intently at (studies) the perfect law,” (the law of God), and lives by it is the person who will be blessed.

The “perfect law, the law of liberty,” is the Scripture itself. Today, that would include the entire Bible, but at the time this letter was written it referred to the Old Testament (and the teachings of Christ). The Word of God is

1. The means of regeneration (v. 18).
2. The agency for Christian growth (v. 21).
3. A mirror that reflects our defects (v. 23).
4. The ethical guide for Christian living (v. 25; 2:8).
5. The standard for judgment (2:12).

Therefore, if the Scripture is not the infallible, inerrant Word, what is it? Furthermore, as I have often stated it, if God could not have produced a perfect work (original manuscripts) why do we call Him God? And if he could have produced a perfect work and refused to do it, what kind of God is He?

Questions arise out of questions. Why, for example, does one person read the Bible and go on about his business without any obvious effect? Why does another person read it and the change in his life is obvious from the first? The answer is that the second person reads it, obeys it, and applies it.

WIERSBE says this verse “tells us we must gaze carefully (not glance casually) into the Word, study it, and through it see ourselves. We must then obey what the Word says. If we do, we will be happy (blessed).”^{xl} He continues, “It is not reading the Bible that makes a person happy; it is obeying what it says. He calls the Word ‘the perfect law of liberty’ because obedience to the Word produces spiritual liberty (John 8:30-32). Living the Christian life is not bondage, it is wonderful liberty!”^{xli}

James uses the word “perfect” a number times this chapter.

- (1) There is God's perfect work (1:1-2).
- (2) God's perfect gift (1:13ff; 211-27).
- (3) God's perfect law (1:21-27).

God's "perfect work" is to nurture us to maturity. His "perfect gift" is the gift of His grace to see us through times of testing. His "perfect law" is the Word that strengthens and sustains us.

1:26 - IF ANYONE THINKS HIMSELF TO BE RELIGIOUS. *"If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless."* In verses 22-25, the writer speaks of the private life of believers as they look into the Word of God. Verses 26-27 describe their public life, that is, their implementation of what they learn from the Word of God. "If" assumes that there are some who do think of themselves as religious, and the clear implication is that there are some who think so have little basis in it. Therefore, he gives one test by which we may gauge our relationship with God: If the Christian thinks of himself (or herself) as a spirit-filled, faithful follower of Christ, but not "bridle his tongue" he is deceiving himself and his "religion is worthless."

The Greek word for "religious" means the outward practice of religion. Colleges (secular and "religious" schools) offer classes in the religions of the world, or contemporary religions. Even though I will at times refer to the Christian faith as a religion because of its popular use, I have often stressed that Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship. When I refer to Christianity as a religion, I consider it an accommodation (and I am not completely comfortable with it). Nowhere does the Bible call Christianity simply another religion. Religion has to do with man's quest for God, a god, or gods. Christianity has to do with God's quest for a relationship with man whom He created in His own image. Religion is man reaching up (trying to climb up - as with the Tower of Babel). Christianity is God coming down to seek and save man.

At the beginning, the Christian movement was simply referred to as "the way." Saints were first called Christians at Antioch of Syria. Christianity is a relationship based upon a divine revelation. I have a Jewish friend with whom I often talk on a variety of subjects. He stresses that he is "not religious." He stresses that he is a scientist, by which I infer that he considers the two world views incompatible. He has stated his conviction that religion has caused a lot of the trouble in the world. He said, "I sometimes think the world would be better off without any religion." I responded, "I think you may be right." I often wonder if I surprised him when I agreed with him. But I quickly added, "That's why I am glad I am not into a religion; I am into a relationship."

DOES NOT BRIDLE HIS TONGUE. Vain religion is expressed in many ways, not the least of which is an unbridled tongue. "When men take more pains to seem religious than really to be so, it is a sign their religion is in vain."^{xliii} James will have a lot to say on the subject of the tongue, but at this point we should not forget the context. Genuine faith is contrasted with pseudo-faith. So, in

keeping with the his emphasis upon genuine faith and its manifestation through good works, James defines religion that is pure and undefiled (pure religion) in terms of one's ability (and willingness) to:

- (1) Control his tongue.
- (2) Minister to others (i.e., widows and orphans).
- (3) Pursue moral purity.

By contrast, failure to bridle the tongue, failure to minister and moral failure are signs of vain religion. "The man who has a slandering tongue, cannot have a truly humble, gracious heart."^{xliii} Years ago I read a poem about the tongue. I have forgotten the author but I recall the first few lines:

The tongue a tiny member is
Which lights a mighty flame;
The jungle beasts can man control,
The tongue he cannot tame.

ILLUSTRATIONS ON THE TONGUE:

It is said, "The spoon always seems twice as large when you have to take a dose of your own medicine." In the light of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 12, we might paraphrase that truth, "Words which appear to be just tiny molehills of idleness and frivolity here will loom as mountains of error when we face them in the judgment!" Not only the wicked utterances of the tongue will rise up against us in that day, but for every foolish, idle word we shall also be called to give a strict account!

It has been estimated that most people speak enough in one week to fill a large 500-page book. In the average lifetime this would amount to 3000 VOLUMES or 1,500,000 pages! It is a frightening thought that by these words we shall either be "justified" or "condemned."^{xliv}

Story in USA Today, December 30, 1988:

Recently CBS released The Karen Carpenter Story. Karen died unexpectedly nearly six years ago of heart failure at age 32 brought on by years of self abuse from the eating disorder Anorexia Nervosa. But what brought on Karen's fatal obsession with

weight control? It seems a reviewer once called her "Richard's chubby sister".
Lord, please help us to know the power of our words!^{xlv}

Verse 26 is an affirmation of the nature of Christian ministry and the moral posture which inevitably results from faith. It is not the Lord's purpose here to define the complete and full essence of the Christianity. But James will go on to list some key Christian virtues.

1. Avoiding partiality.
2. Providing for the physical needs of other believers.
3. Devoting oneself wholly to God.
4. Rejecting worldly attractions and temptations.
5. Handling financial resources wisely and honestly.
6. Cultivating consistency and fervency in prayer.

1:27 - PURE AND UNDEFILED RELIGION. *"Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world."* I like the NRSV: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world." True N.T. Christianity, which is pure and undefiled before God the Father, is identified by two basic characteristics: The first is a ministry to those in need, and the second is a godly life.

ORPHANS AND WIDOWS. In the first century widows and orphans were at the mercy of the world and when James refers to them, he certainly does not mean to limit our ministry to widows and orphans. He specifically refers to those who were in distress. Today many widows are fortunate enough to have been provided for through insurance policies or social security. Many others have careers, professions, or jobs which enable them to provide for themselves and their children. They were the first to come to mind and to us they are representative of all those who need our help. There are single parent families today that need out ministry. We could prepare a list of people who need caring for today, but I would like to challenge you to think of the special needs of some of our elderly members.

During a fifteen year pastorate in north Louisiana, I talked frequently with the owners and operators of a chain of funeral homes. They also owned a large, very modern nursing home. One day I saw Charles at the nursing home and we stopped and talked about the importance of visiting the residents. He made a statement that turned on a light in my mind. I had subconsciously observed a change, but I had not identified it until that moment. He said, "It's not like it used to be. Because of Home Health people can stay at home a lot longer than they used to, and when they come to the nursing home they are not able to do the things many of the residents used to do." I recalled all the activities I had observed at one time: bowling, trips to malls or shopping centers, movies, and visits with families. But many residents today are less ambulatory and they are often there for a shorter period of time before they develop serious hearth problems which require more medication and more skilled care.

That means that they are confined to bed or to their room most of the time and they are progressively more dependant upon professional care givers. In many cases their children and grandchildren, even if they live nearby, may not visit as often as people would have a generation or two ago because in so many homes both husbands and wives are working and they can only visit at night. They spend a lot of time by themselves, often unable to visit with other residents. Another problem is that some are annoyed by residents who wander into their room and will not leave until a staff member discovers them and takes them back to their room.

Many of these seniors were once active in a local church, they built the buildings, and they paid the bills for years, only to be forgotten by their church in their old age. They are still interested in their church and often ask questions of their pastor. Very few have ever complained to me because their family does not visit, or because their church members do not visit them. They express their deep appreciation for those visits they do receive. Some of the visits made to the nursing home or skilled care unit may not be convenient for us; some visits may not be comfortable for us; some may be emotionally draining. Sometimes after visiting those with hearing impairments we may leave with sore throat. We may be a little embarrassed when we have to shout to be heard, knowing that nurses, aids, and visitors are stopping to see what is going on, or to hear what you are saying. But it is more than worth it to see the joy a visit can bring to a dear saint who loves a visit from a Christian friend.

UNSTAINED BY THE WORLD. Religion that is pure and undefiled is not fulfilled in service to others alone. True Christianity is a relationship and the believer's relationship with a holy God will be reflected in a holy life. In fact, the life of the true believer is an exchanged life - "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27, NKJV). Paul expressed it perfectly: "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil 1:21, NKJV). Because we are justified by grace through faith, and sanctified by grace through faith, Paul wrote:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that *you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God*, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:1-2, emphasis added).

This was certainly no new concept. They were familiar with the Scripture from Isaiah 1:16-17.

Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow.

CHAPTER II

I. PURE RELIGION PROHIBITS PARTIALITY, 2:1-7.

A. Warning Against Partiality, 2:1

2:1 - MY BRETHREN. “*My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.*” James addresses his readers fifteen times in this epistle as “brethren,” or “my brethren”. That a Jewish writer writing to Jews would use this address two or three times would not be surprising, but anytime there is this much repetition in Scripture we have to ask why. In the first place, James is the human author, the Holy Spirit the divine Author. This Scripture is “God breathed.” In the second place, this epistle was written in the early days of the church, and the repeated use of the term shows that it is taking on a distinctive Christian character among early believers. He identifies with these First Century Jewish believer who struggles with the same temptations they face. As a Jew, James is their brother, but there is more to it than that. He is their brother in Christ. He is also a fellow sufferer.

It seems that I read somewhere about a speech that John Wayne made about hyphenated Americans: African-Americans; Latin-Americans; Asian-Americans; Native-Americans. It was John Wayne’s theory that hyphenated-Americans was one of the things that was wrong in this country. The use of the terms divides this country, especially when some members of any of these groups use it in such a way as to distance themselves from those of European ancestry - more specifically from the men of that persuasion. If I were a part of one of those hyphenated minorities, there might be a strong temptation to think that way. Here is the problem: divisions weaken a country and by consistently driving wedges between various groups, based either on things they can change (behavior) or things they cannot change (race) we weaken the country. If all Americans will begin thinking of themselves as Americans, and teaching that to their children, we have the potential of a unity this country has not know in the last few generations.

Walter Williams is an American, a black man who will not be pushed into thinking of himself as a black-American, or an African-American. He is an American. He has often written or spoken about this issue. Surprisingly, he says that he does not belong to the NAACP because they accomplished what it set out to do in the nineteen-sixties. This thought would probably surprise most Americans, black and white. If he is right, why is Jesse Jackson buzzing around all over American charging that every kind of problem that involves a black person is racially motivated? Has it ever occurred to anyone that if Jesse Jackson ever accomplishes his goals he will have to go out and get a job? He would be standing in the employment with countless white liberals who have used race to for their political advantage, or to insure that their slot in the bureaucracy.

There is no doubt that some would call me a racist for even thinking of such a thing. If not, they will after the next statement. There are some blacks who constantly use the term “brother” or “bro” in a way that draws a line of distinction between themselves and others. Is that a sin? No. Does it have the potential to divide? Yes. The term may be used to stress unity, or it may be used in such a way as to assure the continuation of the hyphenated American mentality. There are racists in our society and racism is sin, whether it is harbored by whites, blacks, Hispanics, Asians, Indians, or others.

How does one overcome all that divides us in America? The slavery issue is often used to divide us, but I am convinced that many of the people, black and white, who harp on slavery are not primarily concerned about slavery. If they were, we would hear a lot more about the evils of slavery in Africa or Southeast Asia. Thomas Sowell has often pointed out that every race and culture has supplied its share of slaves - and slave holders. But whether the issue is slavery or race, how do we ever move beyond it and begin looking for answers to American problems? After all, if it is cathartic for white people to seek solution to black problems, is it not reasonable to assume that it would be cathartic for black individuals to become more involved in solving problems facing others who need them? This is not about denying anything to any person of any minority, it is all about opening the door to a new way of thinking that will lead us to seek solutions rather than assigning blame.

But how, you may ask, can we do that? Will that ever happen? Not as long as it is politically expedient, or profitable in some other way to exacerbate the division. But there is a solution! The only answer is in a genuine modern day spiritual awakening in America, a revival that will give us what we need, spiritually, politically, and socially. It can be summed up in a word. Forgiveness. There are often many advantages in addressing certain issues, but whether we are talking about racial tension in America, or the intense hatred between two different Semitic peoples in the Middle East, we are never going to solve these problems by simply addressing them. It is better to address them than to kill over them, but that is still not going to solve all that divides the groups. Only when we forgive past offenses and start afresh with a commitment of peace and unity will we see a victory over those discriminations that divide people.

In Christ there is a new brotherhood. We are one in the bond of His love. When we look upon the Lord as we should, we will be able to look upon one another as we should. All true Christians are brothers and sisters in Christ, and we need each other during the trials that we all must face, but more particularly during times of persecution.

DO NOT HOLD YOUR FAITH. The NKJV follows the KJV, “**the faith;**” whereas the NAS and NRSV translate it “**your faith.**” The NIV translates it, “My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don’t show favoritism.” Literally, it is “My brethren, not with respect of persons have (or do have) **the faith** of our Lord Jesus Christ (Lord) of glory...” But why belabor the point? “**Your faith**” has to do with your belief in Jesus Christ for salvation and your trust in Him as Lord of your life. “**The Faith**” speaks of that which Jesus revealed of Himself and His will for man

- the Gospel, sound doctrine.

An individual is saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Once he is saved he is expected to keep “the faith” of (in) “our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.” The Lord fully expects him to live according to the teachings of Christ, to know and apply the doctrines of the Bible in his daily life.

PERSONAL FAVORITISM. The KJV has “with respect of persons;” the NKJV, “with partiality.” Whichever we follow the meaning is clear: Christians must not show personal favoritism. We must show no partiality, especially in regard to all those people to whom the world shows partiality - those of position, wealth, power, an reputation - who might come into the congregation “our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.” Literally, James says, the Lord, the Glory. He is our glory (Heb. 1:3).

Dear Christian, here is where the rubber hits the road. You are guilty! If you are not personally guilty, I can assure you that you fall into that category the pollsters love so much - the margin of error of three percent! I am guilty. You are guilty. Neither of us wants to admit it, but we must confess it to the Lord and seek forgiveness. We do not admit it because we think of blatant offences. This sin may be very obvious, or it may be incredibly subtle. For example, two little five year old girls walk are walking up the walk to their Sunday School department, the really beautiful one is wearing the most beautiful dress you have ever seen, the very ordinary one is wearing a very ordinary dress. You meet them and exclaim, “What a beautiful_____.” Fill in the blank. What would most people have to write in the blank. To many people would have to write “child” or “dress.” They say, “Isn’t that the most beautiful child you have ever seen?” Or, “Isn’t that the most beautiful dress you have ever seen?”

What might we say that would let both little girls enter her class with a sense of joy, and leave thinking that it was good to have been in the house of the Lord? It must be something over which that child has some control - her smile, courtesy, manners, her attitude. We are not talking about a beauty contest or a fashion show, we are talking about the church of “our glorious Lord.”

I write all over the margin of my Bibles . An elderly man, with a certain air that implied that he had too much respect for the Word of God to do that, once said to me, “I would never write in a Bible.” When he said it he was holding a Thompson’s Chain Reference Bible. When I hear something like that I point out that if Dr. Thompson can write in my Bible, I can write in it. So, if your you have no aversion to writing in your Bible, let me make a suggestion. At this point move over to the margin and write, “WARNING: A SERIOUS STUDY OF THIS EPISTLE MAY LEAVE YOU WITH SOME BRUISES AND ABRASIONS (spiritual speaking, of course).

In this Epistle we come face to face with a side of our personality we would really like to ignore or deny. It is a lot easier to confess that we may be tempted to commit any number of other sins before we admit that we struggle with this temptation. Public figures may confess to adultery,

substance abuse, even murder, but they vehemently deny any charge that they are biased or prejudiced against anyone else.

In the current social and political climate in America today great emphasis is placed upon racial, ethnic, and sexual discrimination (gender is a grammatical term!). These issues receive a lot of attention - and deservedly so. We all face temptations in these areas. But one may feel proud of his success in bringing his attitude under control in these areas without facing failures in others areas. As a matter of fact, he may use his relationship with certain a group to insulate himself against any suggestion that he would discriminate against any other person. A study of the Epistle of James might leave such a person bruised and bleeding - or bruised and weeping over our own guilt.

God, in His infinite wisdom, holiness, and love, does not judge people the same way finite human beings judge them. “Those who profess faith in Christ as the Lord of glory, must not respect persons on account of mere outward circumstances and appearances, in a manner not agreeing with their profession of being disciples of the lowly Jesus.”^{xlvi} The child of God who is “being conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom. 8:29) must learn to look upon others as Jesus looks upon them. You can do this, but only if you “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5).

In this epistle of applied Christianity the reader cannot miss how much God despises the sin of partiality or snobbery, whether it is based on economic, moral, racial, class, or other human distinctions. But we make judgments all the time! The first Psalm emphasizes the importance of discerning between right and wrong. We must be very careful as to the basis for our discrimination. We must make distinctions in dealing with other people, but we can discern the spirit without despising the person.

AN ILLUSTRATION.

Shortly after the close of the Civil War, in a fashionable Richmond church, members of the congregation were invited to come to the altar rail to receive Holy Communion.

After several rows of worshipers came and left after receiving Communion side by side, a black man walked down the aisle toward the altar. A tense silence gripped everyone. No one got up to come down to receive the bread and wine, although many had not yet received Communion. The black man started to kneel alone.

Quietly, a tall, graying man with a military bearing stood up and strode down the aisle to the black man's side. Together, they knelt.

Before the officiating clergyman could continue, people recognized that the person kneeling beside the black man without showing any distinction was General Robert E. Lee. Although Lee said nothing, everyone realized he had shown his faith through

his act of joining that lonely black worshiper at the altar.

Lee's example is an example for all. We must not be content with any system that divides us as fellow Christians. We must seek to demonstrate our essential unity. Only then can we say truly: "We are one in Christ."^{xlvi}

B. The Absurdity of Partiality, 2:2-7.

2:2 - IF A MAN COMES INTO YOUR ASSEMBLY. *“For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes...”* The word translated assembly is literally, synagogue (*sunagoge*, Gk.). This word here does not mean a Jewish synagogue, but here it denotes the meeting place for the church. “The use of this very Jewish word for the gathering of God's people for worship is an additional evidence for an early date for the Epistle of James.”^{xlviii}

GOLD RING. We are told that it was not uncommon for some first century believers to wear several gold rings at the same time as a mark of wealth and social distinction (Luke 15:22). James is contrasting the person who enters the assembly wearing a gold ring and “dressed in fine clothes” with a poor man who enters the same church meeting place in dirty clothes. We should not focus on the social reasons the man's clothes were dirty, but on the contrast in circumstances. The gold ring and expensive clothes were outward evidences of wealth and the dirty clothes were an outward sign of poverty. We are not talking about one who can afford soap and water but will not use it. While we have plenty of soap and water in America, there are places that are not so blessed. Let us assume that James says exactly what the Holy Spirit wanted him to say. We may look with disgust upon one who is dirty, but God loves him and Jesus died for him.

We might say that there is a difference between old dirt and fresh dirt, and that is true. A very successful professional man once told me about his favorite fishing spot. He pointed to his fifteen year old daughter and said, “She used to go with me, but I can't get to go with me now.” To which she responded, “Well, you always stop at that place and drink coffee with those dirty old men.” He said, “Those men are not dirty, they are working men.” I appreciated his reply because when I was growing up in the Mississippi Delta, there was never a day when I came in from the field without dirty clothes. Sadly, some wore those same clothes for days at a time before washing them. That tends to put some distance between people!

When I was growing up on a farm near Sledge, Mississippi, I went to Sunday School and worshiped at the Green River Baptist Mission church early Sunday morning. We got home just in time to turn on the television and get the morning worship from Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis. We usually heard the special music and then saw R. G Lee go to the pulpit. I made it a point to hear Dr. Lee in person whenever I had an opportunity. I remember a story he once told that illustrates the attitude of people who think they are beyond this attitude.

Dr. Lee said he was invited to preach in another city where he was known by reputation. A week before the revival he traveled to that city, and attended the Sunday evening service dressed in old faded overalls and sporting a three day growth of whiskers and disheveled hair. He sat in the back and observed the glances he received. No one spoke to him or did anything to indicate that he was welcome there. The next Sunday he was there early for the morning service and the congregation was buzzing with excitement because R. G. Lee was beginning a revival in their church.

Dr. Lee said that when he went to the pulpit he acknowledge all the publicity and the unbelievable welcome he had received. He then proceeded to announce that they would have no revival in that church. He asked. "Do you remember that old man in the overalls who sat on the back pew last Sunday night? I was that man, and all you people who were so gracious in greeting me this morning made no effort to speak to me last Sunday night when you thought I was just some old man who had come in off the street. As some evangelists are fond of saying, "Amen - or Oh me!!?"

2:3 - YOU PAY SPECIAL ATTENTION. *"And you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, 'You sit here in a good place,' and you say to the poor man, 'You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool.'" There were those who assigned seats or positions to people based upon their dress and other signs of wealth. But how does that apply to us today? Our culture is different today, as are our customs. We do not assign seats in our services, but if we had the services in our homes where the host assigned seats, we might witness the same type of discrimination.*

Today we may not assign seats in our sanctuary, but we do elect people to serve on committees, teach classes, chair key committees, or to serve as deacons. Do we use the same criteria for asking someone to serve on the more prestigious committees than we use to nominate people for the lesser committees? Possibly the real application of this principle in our services has less to do with the assignment of seats or positions than the assignment of our attention and favor. Do we favor some members or discriminate against others based on their circumstances in this world?

That works both ways. Two couples joined a new church and the Sunday School class to which they were directed. They soon discovered that the men were the only professional people in the class, which did not bother them at all. They had every desire to fit in, as did their wives. They made every effort to cultivate a relationship with other members of their class but were often surprised on Sunday morning to discover that there had been a meal or a party on Saturday night and everyone in the class was contacted but these two couples. It happened so often that it could not have been an oversight.

Take a hypothetical case that might be played out in any church in the country: Two families join a church, one family is dressed in discount store clothes, the other in designer apparel. Who gets the most attention - after the obligatory greeting? The two teenaged boys go to the same Sunday School class and attend youth programs together. One boy wears brand "X" clothes, the other designer jeans and the expensive shoes now being advertised by a popular athlete. Who gets

the attention? One boy rides to church with his parents in an older car; the other drives a sporty new car. Who gets the attention? Better yet, where did those young people in the class get their values?

From whom did the young people in that class learn to discriminate on the basis of wealth, power, or popularity, race or sex? In many cases they brought that attitude from home, but many pick it up from their peers. Who is hurt by this attitude? If only the poor youth is hurt by it, that is too much. But one cannot discriminate against others without being effected by it. Furthermore, the one who is favored may be hurt if it encourages him to use his affluence to promote himself.

In ancient times Israel, as in so many societies throughout history, there were basically two main classes of people, the rich and the poor two, with no distinct middle class as we see today in America. Today, with a large middle class, the lines of distinction may be blurred by a number of factors, not the least of which is deliberate misrepresentation, distortion of research data, and failure to report statistics which do not agree with a particular point of view.

Thomas Sowell, a brilliant black economist, has distinguished himself as an author and columnist. He often points out how certain powerful people, including social scientists, politicians, and popular media personalities, misuse, misrepresent, and manipulate studies and statistics to support their agenda. In one of his books, *The Vision of the Anointed*, he observes that there are people with great influence who seem obsessed with proving that in every case in which they find any kind of inequality, there must be discrimination which is crying out for governmental intervention. When they study a poll and discover a difference between groups they are convinced that they have uncovered discrimination against a group on the basis, usually on race or poverty.

Sowell points out that the “anointed” have their agenda, and use their statistics to prove there is a crisis that demands correction by government agency. They use the electronic media and the press to apply pressure to congress and the president to get bills passed and programs set up and funded to deal with this crisis. In the process they convince millions that they have uncovered evidence of gross discrimination, and in so doing they often create racial strife and class envy, both of which divide the country today. Dr. Sowell illustrates his point in discussing charges of discrimination against black loan applicants. Alicia Munnell was principle author of a Boston Federal Reserve Bank study which made such a claim. She was contacted by *Forbes* magazine and asked about the study. The following discussion ensued:

FORBES: Did you ask the question that if defaults appear to be more or less the same among black and whites, that points to mortgage lenders making rational decisions?

Munnell: No.

Munnell does not want to repudiate her study. She tells FORBES, on reflection, that the census data are not good enough and could be “massaged” further: “I do believe that discrimination occurs.”

FORBES: You have no evidence?

Munnell: I do not have evidence. . . . no one has evidence.

Sowell adds, “This lack of evidence, however, has not prevented a widespread orgy of moral outrage in the media.” [Sowell: 42].^{xlix}

Sowell claims that evidence is often misrepresented, if not manufactured, to prove discrimination in discussions of “the rich” and “the poor.” Studies prove that Americans do not remain in one income bracket for life, and often not even for a decade.

Both the top 20 percent who are called “the rich” and the bottom 20 percent who are called “the poor” represent a constantly changing set of individuals. A study of income tax returns showed that more than four-fifths of the individuals in the bottom 20 percent of those who filed income tax returns in 1979 were no longer there by 1988.¹

A University of Michigan study found that “less than half of the families followed from 1971 to 1978 remained in the same quintile of the income distribution throughout those years.”^{li} Sowell concludes that

This turnover of individuals within each bracket may well explain some strange data on those people labeled “the poor.” Nearly half of the statistically defined “poor” have air conditioning, more than half own cars, and more than 20,000 “poor” households have their own heated swimming pool or Jacuzzi. Perhaps most revealing, the statistically defined “poor” spend an average of \$1.94 for every dollar on income they receive.^{lii}

Perhaps you will agree with Thomas Sowell’s conclusion: “Clearly, something strange is going on.”^{liii} Perhaps you will also see that something strange is going on in comparing our culture and society with those first century readers of the Epistle of James. There was no way anyone would have confused the rich and the poor at that time. And there is no way one would have denied that the rich often discriminated against the poor, nor the fact that the poor often envied, resented, or despised the rich.

Are we to conclude that there is no discrimination going on based on socioeconomic circumstances? Are we to conclude that there is no class envy, no bitter resentment on the part of some poor people for their “rich” neighbors? No - on both counts. What we must conclude, however is something much worse. The simple fact is that we have many socioeconomic groups, all of whom must struggle with their attitude toward all the other groups: envy for those in higher

brackets, condescension toward those in lower brackets, and jealousy for those in one's own bracket - that is, if we can clearly define our own bracket). To complicate things, class envy and racial strife is generated by a steady barrage of news reports, documentaries, television programs, and newspaper articles. Class envy and racial rage have been used as tools by the "anointed" to promote a certain agenda, without any regard for division, hatred, and violence they have caused in America. Our people are bringing these attitudes to church and our members are taking these attitudes with them to school, to work, to the park, and back to church. The message of James has never been more relevant.

Years ago a specialist in evangelism shared with me the results of various studies into various socioeconomic groups. He pointed out that there are nine socioeconomic groups in America. They are:

1. Upper Upper
2. Middle Upper
3. Lower Upper

4. Upper Middle
5. Middle Middle
6. Lower Middle

7. Upper Lower
8. Middle Lower
9. Lower Lower

My friend pointed out that in reach out to these groups a church can go up one and down two brackets, but you cannot go up two or down more than two. If your church is Middle-Middle, you can reach Upper Middle and you can reach Lower Middle and Upper Lower socioeconomic families, but that is as far as you can go. Why? It is not that those involved in outreach do not want to reach other groups, and it is not that most of these churches will not welcome them. The problem is that the families looking for a new church feel comfortable with people in their own socioeconomic group, or those closest to it. There is nothing wrong with that, but we should be sure that we do not make that decision for them on the grounds that we are not comfortable with them.

There are exceptions to that principle, as a friend recently pointed out. He had attended a meeting that focused upon the inner city church staying in the inner city after the demographics change and ministering to the residents, even after most of the members move to the suburbs. He told of a pastor whose church decided to move to the suburbs. He decided to stay and try to reach those who were moving into the area. After a few years the church experienced phenomenal growth, for which he was grateful. But what had him excited was the make-up of his congregation. There were people of all ethnic and socioeconomic groups worshiping comfortably with each other. The laborer in the sport shirt and jeans sat comfortable with the business in the most expensive suit.

Unfortunately, many people make no effort to reach out to certain people in their community on the grounds that “they are not our kind of people.” There is another unfortunate situation that sometimes occurs in a church. The church enters an evangelism program and puts forth a major effort to get people into the church. When these people make a public profession of faith and are baptized, or when they join by letter, they receive a hearty welcome by excited and happy members. They anticipate a warm fellowship, only to be disappointed when they discover that those responsible for leading them to place their faith in Jesus Christ are now too busy trying to reach someone else that they have no time for them.

On October 9, 2000, I watched a program on satellite TV - I think it was “It Takes a Miracle.” A black man and his white friend were in a sports bar where there was an altercation with a white man who then waited outside and stabbed the black man in the heart. The black man survived - that was his miracle - and returned to the bar with his friend to celebrate! They overheard a someone telling another person that the assailant had escaped. When this man left they followed him home and called the police, who arrived in time to arrest the escapee. Was this a miracle from God or a “miracle of modern science?” The fact that he went back to the bar might lead us to entertain the possibility that it was the latter.

Here is Paul Harvey’s “the rest of the story.” Program host Richard Thomas interviewed both a policeman and the prosecutor who prosecuted the case. The policeman stated that the man who committed the crime had a record for violence and that an investigation revealed that he hated Blacks and Jews. The prosecutor raved about what a low-life scum the criminal was. As he continued, it seemed to me that he was playing to the camera. He continued his tirade, I had the feeling that he was trying to generate all the emotions possible. As he hammered away - “This is a hate crime” - I thought, “this is political.” This man is putting on a show for voters.

Racism is evil. Murder is really bad! Both are condemned by God, one made the Ten Commandments, both are covered in the Sermon on the Mount. Using the situation to heighten tensions between races is also evil. During the decade of the Nineties many politicians used race and class for political advantages. The Clinton Administration seemed to take this divisive tactic to new heights - or maybe we should to new lows. The news media has mastered the art of playing the race card. The O. J. Simpson trial was carried live on television and millions sat glued to the set, watching every minute possible. Simpson’s attorney “played the race card” to get his client acquitted. As the trial continued, with the “talking heads” interviewing experts day and night, it was obvious that race became a bigger issue than murder with some viewers.

In an October, 2000 Monroe, LA News-Star, a Gannett paper, a black politician was quoted as saying that he would go anywhere he could fight a white person. It is interesting that many are convinced that only white people can be guilty of racism. However, discrimination hurts the person who harbors those feelings and attitudes. Would we be guilty of racism if we taught minorities that envy, jealousy, strive, hatred - even anger - hurts the person who nurtures those sins whether he ever

acts on them or not?

FOOTSTOOL. This denotes a lowly place, in this case it probably means that the wealthy person was given the best seat in the house and the poor person was told to sit on the floor at his feet.

2:4 - HAVE YOU NOT MADE DISTINCTIONS. *“Have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?”* If we show partiality on the basis of wealth (or other circumstance over which people have no control) we have become “judges with evil motives?” It is sinful to show partiality to the rich. “It shows one’s value system to be false (v. 3); it is discrimination (v. 4); it fails to honor the poor, whom God honors (v. 5); it favors those who oppress you (v. 6); it is sin (v. 9).”^{liv}

2:5 - LISTEN, MY BELOVED BRETHREN. *“Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?”* The appeal is both personal and urgent. Spiritual wealth, nor spiritual poverty, is determined by material things or the usual symbols of wealth and success. Any person who has a genuine faith in God, and love for the Lord and other people is wealthy indeed. I thank God that my worth is not determined by how much I pay for my car, house, or clothes. I also thank Him that my happiness is not determined by those things.

Years ago, I met the late Dr. H. Leo Eddleman at the airport in Monroe, Louisiana and drove back to my home in Bastrop, Louisiana. Dr. Eddleman had been president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary when I was a student there, and we spent many hours in the gym together. He and my pastor were friends and his father had been pastor of my home church many years before. We visited on the way to our home and Dr. Eddleman made it a point to get acquainted with my son John. As we entered Bastrop, he looked at the dash and asked, “Johnny, what kind of car is this?” I replied, “It’s a Buick.” His response still blows my mind: “I think I have a Buick.” He could not have cared less, as long as his wife got him to the airport on time.

ILLUSTRATION.

One by one He took them from me
All the things I valued most; 'Til I was empty-handed,
Every glittering toy was lost. And I walked earth's highways, grieving,
In my rags and poverty. Until I heard His voice inviting,
"Lift those empty hands to Me!" Then I turned my hands toward heaven,
And He filled them with a store Of His own transcendent riches,
'Till they could contain no more. And at last I comprehended

With my stupid mind, and dull, That God cannot pour His riches
Into hands already full.^{lv}

2:6 - YOU HAVE DISHONORED THE POOR MAN. *“But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?”* The absurdity of showing partiality is hard to miss - you dishonor the poor who do not oppress you, but show favoritism to “the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?” Who has not known people who condemn the wealthy and successful behind their backs, but fawn over them to their face? I have known people who practically became servants to some affluent person simply for the privilege of calling him by his first name when talking to their friends. Some of those people are very slow to do a favor for a poor person. I used to stop by a business which was run by a man who was always ready to do favors for a much more successful neighbor who lived in the big house down the road. At times it seemed that he had practically become a servant to his neighbor. What was his reward? His conversation was filled with “me and Dan...”

An exception may well be the person who enjoys a paternalistic relationship with others. Some successful people seem to need less fortunate people to bolster their self esteem or self worth. True fellowship in the church is based upon horizontal relationships, not vertical relationships. We must serve others because (1) God loves us, (2) God loves them, and (3) we love them, but never because we need someone to look up to us.

James in no way encourages class envy or mistreatment of the rich. There is an attitude in America that seeks to “soak the rich.” Many modern politicians seem to cause divisions and create envy and then try to convince the voters they are the only one with the solution to their problems. When you listen to the political rhetoric it seems that there is a massive effort on to create class envy in America. There is a real danger in this. “As rust corrupts iron, so envy corrupts man” (Antisthenes (C. 445–C. 365 B.C.).

In this verse, James deals with the treatment of the poor by the rich and the attitude of Christians toward both groups, not to create a bias against the rich, but to discourage partiality on the basis of wealth. The same principle might apply to celebrities, or influential politicians. They do not deserve preferential treatment, but the poor should not be treated with disrespect. He was a humorist who said, “The Lord must love poor people, because He sure made a lot of them.” And as long as there are rich people and poor people in the world there will be envy and there will be disrespect. But neither should come from God’s children.

2:7 - DO THEY NOT BLASPHEME. *“Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?”* That is, do the rich not blaspheme “the fair name by which you have been called?” While there are many wealthy people who love the Lord and serve Him faithfully, it is still a fact that “the rich and famous,” and the powerful, have often abused the poor and mocked the name of Jesus Christ by which we are called. But if history teaches us anything, it is that people have always shown favoritism to the rich and ignored the poor to a great extent, and they will

continue to do it. However, the Lord's Church is no place for this kind of discrimination - and we had better be very careful about encouraging or supporting reverse discrimination (i.e., affirmative action).

II. THE ROYAL LAW, 2:2-13.

A. The Royal Law is the Law of Love, 2:8.

2:8 - THE ROYAL LAW. James states it simply and succinctly: "*If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well.*" It is rightly called the royal law because it was given by the King, and because it is the supreme law governing the Christian's relationship with others. The Greek word seems to suggest that the latter may be the emphasis here.

ROYAL. The Greek word translated royal is *basilikos*. The Godspeed Greek\Hebrew Bible software program defines it this way: "Regal (in relation), i.e. (Lit.) Belonging to (or befitting) the sovereign (as land, dress, or courtier), or (fig.) Preeminent: - king's; nobleman, royal" [GS: GH]. It is from *basileus* which denotes the foundation of power.

LOVE. It helps to understand the definition and use of two words that are translated love in the New Testament. The first is *phileo*, which means to be a friend to or to have a fondness for another, denoting a personal attachment (with emphasis upon feelings). The second is *agapao* which is wider, embracing especially "the judgment and deliberate assent of the will as a matter of principle, duty, and propriety." It helps to understand that the two "stand related...; the former being chiefly of the heart and the latter of the head."

It is an over-simplification to say that *phileo* is human love and *agapao* is godly love. In John, the Father loves the Son with *phileo* love, and men love (agapao) darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil (John 3:19). Agapao, the Royal Law, is a mental attitude love that can, and must be, directed by the mind and will; and while emotions will be involved, it is not driven by emotions. That is the reason it can be commanded - you cannot command emotions as you command actions. Agapao type love seeks the highest good for every person. The Royal Law is the foundation for all Christian relationships and the guideline for the believer's attitude others.

The children of God and *the children of the devil* are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who *do not love their brothers and sisters*. For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that *we should love one another* (1 John 3:10-11, NRSV, emphasis added).

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love (1 John 4:7-8).

NEIGHBOR. When the command to love one's neighbor is given in the NT, "various 'neighbors' are focused on: the desperate person in Luke 10:27; the weaker brother in Gal. 5:14; everyone in Rom. 13:9; and the poor man here."^{lvi} Of the ninety-three times the word "neighbor" appears the Bible, perhaps the best known use is in the tenth chapter of Luke's Gospel. It was in response to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" that Jesus told the Story of the Good Samaritan. Solomon had a lot to say about one's neighbor:

"He who despises his neighbor lacks sense..." (Pro. 11:12).

"The righteous is a guide to his neighbor..." (Pro. 12:26).

"He who despises his neighbor sins, But happy is he who is gracious to the poor" (Pro. 14:21).

B. Partiality Violates the Royal Law, 2:9-13.

2:9 - IF YOU SHOW PARTIALITY. *"But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors."* If you do show partiality (whether you admit to it or not) "you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors." I grew up in a rural Baptist mission in the Mississippi delta (and I grew up in church). If the doors were open we were there, we never worked on Sunday and always stopped work on Wednesday afternoon in time to get to prayer meeting. Because it was a mission church the director of missions preached for us every Sunday for a number of years. He brought some very distinguished pastors and denominational workers to that little mission church. I found it interesting at first (but in time, tiresome) that when we had a visiting minister, someone would always seem to get around to asking, "Brother Andrews, do you believe it is a sin to dance?" Or, "Do you believe it is a sin to play cards?" "Is it a sin to go to a movie on Sunday?" Usually, we knew who they had in mind when they asked the question! In all those years, and during my entire ministry, I cannot remember anyone asking, "Do you think it is wrong to show partiality?"

I have a confession: I have shown partiality. And when I did, it was a sin. Would you like to confess? I cannot confess for you, and you may be as uncomfortable confessing it as I, but not one of us is completely without guilt. The temptation is with us every day, and while the temptation is not sin, yielding is. When we confess our sins (John 1:9) - we must confess this sin. It is not enough to pray, "Father, forgive me for whatever sins I may have committed in the past week." We must be purged of it (1) because of what it does to us; (2) because of what it may do to others; and (3) because of what it absolutely will do to the church. The following are just a few of the evils of

showing partiality:

(1) There is the sin of judging others. In order to judge others we must assume we are superior to them. Only God is qualified to judge another person.

(2) The sin of partiality leads to other sins because those who commit this sin lack respect for others and will be tempted to treat them accordingly.

(3) It transgresses the Royal Law, the law of love. The greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; and the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as you love yourself.

(4) Those who violate the Royal Law through prejudice and favoritism are guilty of violating the whole law (vs. 13).

Now, I have another confession. I show partiality every day. I deliberately discriminate and I taught my sons to discriminate. I prefer the company of Christian people to lost people. I have a burden for lost people, but I must not adopt their world-view; I must not adopt their attitudes; I must not adopt their behavior; and I must not expose my family to their influence.

In working with young people in the church we must reach out to lost young people and try to win them to Jesus Christ, but we should always monitor our activities. Some lost teenagers are very persuasive and some Christian young people are very impressionable. We should try to bring lost young people into our youth program, but we need to let them know that we stand for something more than pizzas and Pepsis, or Cokes and cookies.

A friend who was principal of a local school once assured me that as one who watched young people every day, he could tell me that their peer group determines what they are going to do. "Their parents think they do, but they don't," he said. "Their peers do." But parents must be careful to direct their children to the right peer group. They must teach them to be discriminating in choosing friends, and they should be very discriminating in inviting friends to their home.

We absolutely must not discriminate on the wrong basis (riches, ethnicity), but we absolutely must discriminate on the right basis (morality, attitudes). In the first Psalm, the psalmist gives us practical advice as well as a spiritual lesson.

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night (Ps. 1:1-2, NKJV).

In short, a man is deceiving himself if he thinks he can keep the royal law, the Ten Commandments, the two Great Commandments Jesus placed at the top of the list of man's obligations to God, or the Golden Rule while showing partiality. This in no way discourages close personal friendships within the fellowship, but it identifies as sin any effort to show snobbery, condescension, or animosity on the basis of outward appearances. One of the serious problems with this kind of partiality is that it violates every rule of God governing our relationship with other believers. Furthermore, those who commit this sin assume the role of judge, a role reserved for God alone.

2:10 - WHOEVER KEEPS...YET STUMBLES. *“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.”* Even one sin, no matter how small or great, makes us sinner (“guilty of all”). One sin places one in violation of the whole law of God and bring the sinner under condemnation.

2:11 - FOR HE WHO SAID. To illustrate the point he has just made James points out that the same God Who said, *“DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,”* also said, *‘DO NOT COMMIT MURDER.’* *Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.”* If you do not actually commit murder, but brood over some injustice, whether real or imaginary, until you hate another, you are also guilty of sin. Sin, small or great, makes one guilty before God as a sinner and guilt is a serious matter. Fallen man may distinguish between a “white lie” or a “little lie” and a big lie, but God does not. In fact, drawing the distinction may be a sin within itself in that it does not take seriously the One who gave the law.

2:12 - SO SPEAK AND SO ACT. *“So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.”* We will be judged by a just and righteous Judge. Obedience to God's law brings true freedom; disobedience brings bondage. Larry Burkett (*What Ever Happened to the American Dream*, p. 43) quotes William Bradford, the governor of the Plymouth Colony of pilgrims as saying, “Those who believe in the Holy Scriptures are bound to observe its teachings. Those who do not are to be bound by its consequences.”^{vii}

2:13 - MERCY TRIUMPHS OVER JUDGMENT. The Scripture is very clear: *“For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy;”* for *“mercy triumphs over judgment.”* Christians have to make judgments every day and many of those judgments have to do with other people. A few of those people may be godly people, but some of them may be really bad people. We must judge between them - but we should be very care about the criteria used in judging them. If we judge on the right grounds (moral, spiritual) it is good, but if we judge on the wrong grounds (wealth, power, influence) it is evil. Judgment will be merciless to us if we judge without mercy.

We have seen many examples of judgment without mercy played out before the entire nation. During the Senate confirmation hearings on Clarence Thomas, who was at the time a nominee for the Supreme Court, Anita Hill brought some horrifying charges against him. She accused him of sexual harassment and feminists across America joined liberal senators in one of the most vicious

attacks this country has ever seen. Later, however, when President was charged with sexual harassment by Paula Jones, those same feminists who had attacked Clarence Thomas immediately rose to the defense of Clinton. They attacked Paula Jones. What was their motive in each case? Why were they so charitable in one case and so merciless in the other? Clinton was “pro-choice” - a strange term meaning pro-abortion or pro-death.

Does that have anything to do with the Book of James? You bet it does! Some of the most vicious things I have every heard about any persons have been said about Christians - by fellow church members. A little gossip sends some church members into a feeding frenzy. They get such a rush from it that they seem to lose sight of reason, let alone mercy.

Another well publicized illustration of judgment without mercy was seen following the July 1, 1987 nomination of Robert Bork to the Supreme Court. Within an hour Senator Edward Kennedy appeared on nationwide television, “denouncing Bork in the shrillest terms ever leveled against a Supreme Court nominee:

Robert Bork’s America is a land in which women would be forced into back-alley abortions, blacks would sit at segregated lunch counters, rogue police would break down citizens’ doors in midnight raids, schoolchildren could not be taught about evolution, writers and artists would be censored at the whim of the government, and the doors of the Federal courts would be shut on the fingers of millions of citizens for whom the judiciary is often the only protector of individual rights that are the heart of democracy.”^{lviii} [Smith: 59].

F. LaGard Smith, *ACLU: The Devil’s Advocate* (subtitle, *The Seduction of Civil Liberties in America*), said, “How Senator Kennedy thought anyone could believe such a wild characterization of a respected United States Court of Appeals Judge in the rights-conscious 1980s is a mystery.”^{lix} As Smith points out, Kennedy’s charges were but the opening volley in “what would turn out to be a massacre of Judge Bork’s chances for confirmation.”^{lx}

The ACLU immediately expanded the culture war. “The intensity of the ACLU’s own hysteria is most strikingly evidenced in a fund-raising ‘telegram’ sent by the director of the ACLU via ‘Western Union priority letter.’ Among its many expressions of outrage were some of the following statements, presented in full capitals: DETAILED RESEARCH REVEALS BORK FAR MORE DANGEROUS THAN PREVIOUSLY BELIEVED...WE RISK NOTHING SHORT OF WRECKING THE BILL OF RIGHTS...HIS CONFIRMATION WOULD THREATEN OUR SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT...”^{lxi}

Liberals fought to prevent the confirmation of President George W. Bush’s appointment of John Ashcroft as Attorney General of the United States, reportedly for various reasons. He might me a racist, he might be too narrow, his religious views might prevent his pursuit of justice for all Americans. In reality, it seemed that John Ashcroft was “Borked” because he was a Christian and he

was pro-life.

Is this not just more partisan politics? Possibly. But there is little doubt that the culture war between the right and the left in America has led to less civility in dealing with others, and some of the most vicious attacks on individuals in our history. Judgment has often been without mercy - and that merciless attitude has not been confined to congress or to organizations like the ACLU. Unfortunately, it often invades the church and no believer is beyond reach of the temptation. When you are tempted, be warned - those who judge without mercy will be judged without mercy.

When a Christian commits this sin through partiality, prejudice, envy, or condescension, the person against whom it is expressed is often hurt. There may be times, however, when that individual is unaware of the other person's attitude. On the other hand, the sin of showing partiality, judging others on the wrong grounds, will always leave its mark on the guilty person. It is a sin and sin will be punished. "But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23, KJV). The guilty person is seldom aware of the terrible price he is paying and will pay for his sin.

There is a lot of unfairness in the world and people are often hurt by it. We are often aware of the pain experienced by the victim of favoritism, but we may not be aware of the toll it takes on the one who harbors and nurtures those attitudes. If permitted to go unchecked, this sin can leave one a very unpleasant person to be around. Our society has been divided, both by prejudice and discrimination on one side, and by resentment of affirmative action which promote reverse discrimination on the other side. Victims in either category are often hurt, and unfortunately, some become bitter or hate those they view as responsible.

My older son worked through high school and saved his money for college, designating a certificate of deposit for each semester for the first few years. When he arrived on campus he was shocked to discover that his hard work, frugality, and self-discipline were not so much a help as a hindrance. He was white, male, and he had saved his money. He did not qualify for any assistance except his academic scholarship, and he was forced to work off campus, because his savings made him ineligible for work on campus in college. If he had blown all his money instead of saving it he could have gotten certain loans and he could have worked on campus.

There were times when my sons would come home from school and tell me about something that happened to them that seemed unfair. There were those times when they were victims of unfair judges during some competition and they were hurt. When something like that happened, I let them talk about it for a while and then I explained that I could see why they thought they had been treated unfairly and why they would be frustrated when they could do nothing about it. I would then say, "Son, I am sorry that this happened to you and in this case it does seem that it was unfair. I know it hurts and that bothers me, but I can live with that. But if I knew that you had treated someone else like that, I would have a lot of trouble living with that."

When you see that your children are victims of partiality, you can easily encourage their

resentment and animosity. But it is far more profitable to take advantage of the opportunity to teach them how a Christian should deal with adversity. They have lost once - don't let them be a double loser!

RELATIONSHIPS

THE TIES THAT BIND US

GOD - Born-again Christians are united in the family of God, bound both to God and to one another. Jesus prayed, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:20-21).

COUNTRY - It is moving to watch athletes from around the world compete in the Olympic games. It is a thrill to see the gold medal winners cross the line and then run to the stands for the flag of their country and then run around the track to the applause of fans from their own country. Americans forget their differences when American athletes stand on the top stand and received their gold medals. We are united in patriotic ecstasy as our athletes stand at attention for the playing of the national anthem and we watched their lips move as they sang mouthed the words of the Star Spangled Banner.

Citizenship involves more than getting goose bumps when the National Anthem is played, Paul wrote, "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves" (Rom. 13:1-2).

FAMILY - A family united by love for one another, and a commitment to God is a blessing to each member. The home is the first institution God instituted for human beings, and after all these centuries it has never lost its importance to society and to the individual.

In 1975 Edith Schaeffer, wife of Dr. Francis Schaeffer, asked a question that deserves an answer every year. That question became the title of her book, *What Is a Family?* It's a good question. Every few months, each one of us would do well to analyze and evaluate our family, facing up to the truth of our answer. Certainly every generation would be wise to do so. It may surprise us. She suggests several answers, each one forming a separate chapter in her book. For example:

A Changing Life Mobile
The Birthplace of Creativity

A Formation Center for Human Relationships
A Shelter in a Time of Storm
A Perpetual Relay of Truth
A Door That Has Hinges and a Lock
A Museum of Memories.^{lxiii}

SCHOOL - I have a sense of loyalty to a number of institutions of higher learning, including Mississippi College and two seminaries. My high school no longer exists, having been consolidated a number of years ago, but the spirit is still alive.

CAREER. People in certain careers, jobs, or fields have certain things in common. There will be healthy competition between people in the same field, but those in the same profession often support each other. I have had an opportunity to observe a number of Christian attorneys who, though they often compete against each other, develop friendships and peer support.

ATHLETICS - Those who participate in team sports are trained to recognize their dependence upon other members of the team. There is a special bond between team mates who have practiced and played together a number of years. This is often seen in the humorous stories they recall.

THE KNOTS THAT TRIP US

GOD - Nothing divides people more than what some of them believe about God. There are atheists, agnostics, and theists. Among the atheists and agnostics there are honest ones and there are dishonest ones. Among the theists there are deists, pantheists, Christians monotheists, Jewish monotheists, Islamic monotheists, and a whole spectrum of cults. Among the cults there are radically differing views, claims and goals.

Among the Christians there are many denominations, ranging from the “mainline” denominations, to the ecstatic in one direction, to the extreme in another direction. There are divisions within denominations (liberal, conservative, and all shades in between). There are also divisions that are politically motivated. Within the same church there are divisions over everything from the pastor to deacons, to carpet, to the music and the nursery and youth programs. There are also divisions along family lines. Sadly, a number of churches have split over the style of worship.

In the year 2000 Baptists in Texas have been engaged in an intense debate of funding of seminaries. This debate has polarized many Southern Baptists to the point that different sides can no longer hear each other. Instead of communicating with one another some have resorted to name-calling. Satan is getting his mileage out of this one. All parties need to go back to the Word of God to see, not how they can secure a win for their side, but what will glorify the Lord.

COUNTRY. There are as many as forty regional wars on the earth at any given time. The threat of conflict that can be escalated with major consequences at any moment (North Korea, is but one example).

In America there are deep divisions along the line of party affiliation, social ideology, and regional interests. The problem may easily be aggravated by biased news coverage. The news media in America has demonstrated rather graphically that the world is at enmity with God. When it misleads, deceives, and manipulates people it serves its master, the devil. That is not say that all in the news business are in league with the devil, but that many of the most powerful people in the business are guilty of bores reporting, which always serves Satan rather than God.

FAMILY. The same-sex marriage issue has now reached the floor of congress. Lesbians and male homosexuals march in the nation's capitol to show their concern for children. Maggie Gallagher (*The Abolition of Marriage*) makes some shocking statements about the American family.

The overthrow of the marriage culture and its replacement by a postmarital culture is the driving force behind almost all the gravest problems facing America - crime, poverty, welfare dependence, homelessness, educational stagnation, even child abuse.^{lxiii}

The suddenness with which marriage has been overthrown is breathtaking. Just 14 percent of white women who married in the forties eventually divorced. A single generation later, almost 50 percent of those married in the sixties and early seventies have already divorced. This explosion in divorce was followed in quick succession by an unexpected surge in out-of-wedlock births. Between 1970 and 1992, the proportion of babies born outside of marriage leaped from 11 percent to 30 percent.^{lxiv}

RACE RELATIONS. The liberal elite (Thomas Sowell's "anointed") in the media, education, social science and politics see discrimination by whites against blacks in almost everything. Most of our woes were caused by white European males, but fortunately for us they feel morally bound to save society through some type of affirmative program or some entitlement.

Nothing can illustrate the problem more than the charges of racism in the cases of a series of fires which destroyed a number of black churches in 1996. President Bill Clinton stated that one of most vivid memories of his childhood was the grief he felt over the burning of black churches in Arkansas. People immediately checked and discovered that there were no black Churches destroyed by arson when he was growing up in Arkansas.

Dr. Walter Williams is, like Sowell, a black economist, author and columnists who has been a frequent guest of various talk-radio shows. Writing in the *National Liberty Journal*, (July, 1996, Vol. 25, No. 7, p. 9), Williams says, "The seemingly racially motivated (seemingly because two

suspects charged were black) ought to be roundly condemned and the perpetrators found and locked up.”^{lxv} He adds, “we should condemn this spate of arson not because it’s against black churches but because arson of any kind is a despicable, cowardly act, especially of houses of worship, regardless of the racial makeup of its congregation.”^{lxvi} Dr. Williams observes that we are not hearing a cry of moral outrage against the burning of black churches today that we heard against the bombing of black in the 1960s. He speculates that one reason may be that whites are not responding today because they “may see it as a kind of come-uppance.” To illustrate his point he points out that

According to the U. S. Justice Department’ 1993 report “highlights From 20 Years of Surveying Crime Victims,” there are about 6.6 million violent crimes committed each year (murder, rape, robbery, and assault).

Twenty percent of those crimes are interracial, but 90% of the victims of interracial crimes are white. Blacks murder whites at 18 times the rate that whites murder blacks.

Black-on-white assaults are 21 times the rate of white-on-black assaults. In cases of rape, blacks are 64 times more likely to rape a white woman than whites are to rape a black woman.

Williams concludes, “Americans are stacking piles of combustible societal kindling in the form of quotas, false reporting, and implicit sanctioning of interracial crimes, waiting to be set ablaze by racial arsonists. We better do something about it while we can.”^{lxvii}

Am I picking on minorities? Absolutely not! Emphatically not. What “bugs” me is that there are politicians who pit the wealthy against the poor, Gen-Xers against their own grandparents, whites against minorities, and men against women for a political advantage. If too many minorities became successful, some politicians would lose their “base.” That really bugs me! While pretending to lift up the less fortunate, they know that if they are successful they may lose their vote.

SCHOOL. School spirit and numerous experiences may unite students, and competition will help prepare them for life, but school, K-12, college, and graduate school is often a hot-bed for envy, jealousy, and strife. These vices are fueled by talent shows, beauty contests, unfairness (perceived or real) in grades, honors, opportunities in clubs and athletics, and all the attitudes that are divisive in society in general.

CAREER. Competition is a key to growth. It may also breed envy and jealousy, and obsessive habits and philosophies in some people.

ATHLETICS. Only so many can make a team. A high school coach once told me that parents bombard coaches with questions and suggestions. “You can’t afford to listen to them too much,” he said, “because parents want three things. First, they want their kid to make the team, second, they want them to start, and third, they want to win - in that order.” He pointed out that they are in the gym for every game, shouting from the stands or talking with him before and after games with their suggestions. But when their son or daughter graduates, most of them stop coming and the coach is left without their support.

In little league the league rules may dictate that the coach play all players, but the volunteer coach wants to win and parents want to see their children on the field. Then they want to see their child make the all-stars. A league director confided, “There’s a lot of politics involved in selecting the all-stars.” Parents push their children, pressure the coach, and shout at the umpire, creating tension and all sorts of relationship problems.

IN THE CHURCH

Unfortunately, the Lord’s church is not immunized against divisive attitudes and behavior. Churches, or groups within a church, may be divided over everything from the pastor and deacons to the way the grass is mowed. My father in the ministry once warned me that the devil can get into the church through music quicker than anything else. Someone puts the nursery in first place. Youth are too often divided by the same things that divide people in the world. But are we not forgetting that it is the Lord’s church when we bring in petty jealousies and envies and promote strife through the motives and attitudes more consistent with the prince of this world than the Lord of the church?

There are divisions over the texture of carpet, the color of the drapery, the format of the bulletin, the budget, Building and Grounds, and the Nominating Committee report. We complain about the special music, gripe about those new people who are trying to take over the youth program, and fuss about the order of services. But major issues, theology and evangelism, seldom lead to major division in most churches. Some divisions that seemed to be doctrinal may be mostly political.

As I have listened to both sides of one particular controversy for forty years, I have often thought that if both sides would admit that there are some radicals in their camp who frighten people in the other camp, they might seek to communicate with the majority on the other side who are not radicals. For example, there may be some “moderates” who say they believe very strongly in the inerrancy of Scripture, but they are afraid that extremists on the other side may then seek to deny them the right to interpret the Scripture as they are led of the Holy Spirit. A reasonable solution may well be to simply ask them if that is their goal.

Satan will do all he can to create relationship problems within the local church, within in a denomination, or between denominations. When we yield to those temptations we have sinned, and possibly tempted others to sin. Satan wants to get in every church, but God forbid that I should become the conduit through which he gets into my church!

I once served a growing church with unlimited potential for growth. Four hundred new houses were to be built beginning four blocks from the church. We had two morning services and the auditorium was almost always packed for the second service. Many of the members wanted a Christian life center (a gymnasium - teams played in a church basketball league). It would have been nice, but I felt led to recommend to the deacons that we build a larger sanctuary and convert the current sanctuary into a Christian life center. If we continued to grow, the next step would be to build a Christian life center and then convert the old auditorium into an educational facility. I was convinced that future growth would be jeopardized by a lack of worship space. A number of deacons were convinced that this was what we should do.

By the time they got around to building a new building I had been called to another church. One of the deacons, a quiet, sincere leader, told me later that when the issue came up in a business meeting, he tried to persuade the church to build a new sanctuary first and then build the gym a little later. But there were a lot of young adults there for the business meeting, many of whom never came to any service, and they voted to build the Christian life center.

Immediately after the vote, this godly deacon stood and asked to speak. He said, "I spoke against building this building because I was convinced that adequate worship space is essential if we are going to reach new people for the Lord. But my church has voted to build a Christian life center, and I want you to know that I am one-hundred percent behind it. I will do everything I can to promote it and to help pay for it. Now, I would like to challenge all of you who voted to build the new building to help us build it and pay for it."

There are things that are far more important than getting my way. It is God's church - not mine. It is for His glory - not mine. It is sustained by His power - not mine. It is His bride - not mine. He can build His church - I cannot. But there is something I can do - and what I can do, I must do if I love Him. I must decide whether I will be stepping stone or a stumbling block in His church.

III. FAITH AND WORKS, 2:14-26.

A. Living Faith and Dead Faith Contrasted, 2:14-20.

1. The inadequacy of a dead faith, 2:14.

There are two obvious problems with a dead faith. In the first place, a dead faith cannot save. In the second place, a dead faith cannot work.

2:14 - CAN THAT FAITH SAVE HIM? “*What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?.*” The NRSV has “what good is it” and the NKJV asks, “What profit is it...?” What profit is it to one’s self, and what good is it to others if we our faith is nothing more than intellectual assent to a set of doctrines or to the possibility that God exists? “No doubt, true faith alone, whereby men have part in Christ's righteousness, atonement, and grace, saves their souls; but it produces holy fruits, and is shown to be real by its effect on their works; while mere assent to any form of doctrine, or mere historical belief of any facts, wholly differs from this saving faith.”^{lxviii}

Note that James did not ask “Can faith save him?” What he asked was, “Can *that* faith save him?” Can that kind of faith save? What kind of faith? A dormant, benign, non-working faith. James is not implying that we are saved by works - what he is saying is that a faith that does not produce good works is a dead faith. James was not contradicting the great Pauline doctrine of justification by grace through faith. Nor does Paul refute James’ claim that true faith is living, active, and productive, and not dead. In Ephesians 2 Paul wrote:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for good works*, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Eph. 2: 8-10, NKJV, emphasis added).

There is no conflict with Paul here. In Rom. 3:21-5:21, Paul is explaining how the sinner is justified (pronounced righteous) by God. James is writing about how the saved person proves (manifests) that salvation before others. “People have no right to believe that we are saved if they do not see a change in our lives. ...Being a Christian is not a matter of what we say with the lips; it involves what we do with the life.”^{lxix}

When my mother-in-law, Mrs. Rachel Turner of Leland, Mississippi sent me a copy of the Mississippi Baptist state paper, *The Baptist Record*, I remember how delighted I was to find a picture of my old Mississippi College Bible professor, Dr. E. R. Pinson, accompanied by an article about the celebration of his ninety second birthday. He was still teaching God’s Word. I called him and we talked about the Sunday School class he was teaching and would teach until his death. I made it a point to thank him for his contribution to my ministry and for his friendship. I told him that I remembered a lot that he taught me and that I had quoted him often in my ministry. My favorite quote from his lectures has always been, “Wind is not wind unless it is blowing, and faith is not faith unless it is working.” Let me repeat that here:

Wind is not wind unless it is blowing, and faith is not faith unless it is working.

Charles N. Pickell (*Works Count, Too*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1960) was right on target when he wrote:

James was aware of the hollowness of men. He saw the shadow that frequently falls between faith professed and deed performed; hence he asks, "What does it profit, my brethren, if a man say he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him?" James 2:14, R.S.V). He then draws a line of distinction between *profession* of faith and *possession* of faith.

There is a word in James's question that casts considerable light on his point of view: "If a man says he has faith..." James does not credit such a man with saving faith; the man only *says* he has faith.^{lxx}

I once enjoyed the friendship of a scientist who had a collection of some seventy dictionaries. He read from them like another person might read fiction or historical narratives. I saw him one day at a health club in Jackson, Mississippi and as soon as he saw me he said, "Johnny, I found a word last night that describes my faith." I believe the word was mini-fidelis. He said, "It means minimum faith and that is what I have." He was honest - sadly honest - because the Bible says that kind of faith never saved anyone.

Francis Shaeffer was both a man for his times and a man ahead of his times. Years before anyone else was talking about it, Shaeffer declared (around 1960) that we were living in the Post-Christian era in America and England. He said that England entered the Post-Christian period in 1895 and America in 1935. He was not far off - in the deep south the Post-Christian era probably began following the Second World War. I read and reread more than twenty volumes by Shaeffer, as well as a collection of letters written by him. He explained that while there still are a lot of active churches and Christian ministries in America, for the most part God is little more than a memory for many Americans. After months of reflections I became convinced that he had a point.

I watched a video tape of a debate between Phil Donahue, who was at the height of his popularity as the host of an afternoon television show, and Dr. Duane Gish of the Institute for Creation Research. The entertainer had written a book on evolution, leaning heavily upon the works of a well known evolutionist. For the brilliant creation scientist the debate with Donahue was a little like fencing with a blind person, but Donahue was playing to an audience that had been brainwashed in a public school classroom to such a degree that any question of denial could only mean that Gish was a right-wing religious nut. During the debate Gish brought up a statement Donahue had made. Donahue repeated the statement: "Evolution flatters God." I thought, evolution flatters God??!?! How can a process that is so inefficient, cruel, and wasteful ever be associated with a God who is omniscient, and omnipotent? How could a model for our origin that is at once blind and without direction flatter a perfect God?

The most popular radio talk show host in history is Rush Limbaugh, who combines humor with political commentary. His program really made an impression on me when I heard it and later when I read what he had written on the subject in his monthly newsletter. Commenting on the moral decline in America, Limbaugh declared, "We must get more God into our society." His thesis was that in order to improve moral conditions we must re-focus our attention on God. I was especially pleased to read that particular article. I was also impressed with his comments on the influence of his grandfather, who practiced law until he was past one hundred years of age. His grandfather was apparently a committed Christian - He knew the Lord. But when I listen to Rush while driving into town to make hospital and nursing home calls, I am occasionally reminded of Shaeffer's diagnosis of malaise in which we find ourselves. I wonder if Limbaugh is speaking from memory or from a deep relationship with God.

Another popular radio talk-show host is G. Gordon Liddy, of Watergate fame. I used to listen to him to see how he handles difficult questions put to him by those who call in to the program. I was especially interested in the answer he would give to a caller's question about how he knows there is a God. Liddy explained the steps he had taken in the process of moving from agnosticism to theism. He stated emphatically that he now believes in God, and bases his belief on logic. His conversations are often filled with profanity, off-color comments, and advocacy of premarital sex. To him it seemed incredulous that a son-in-law, who is "very religious," gives a tenth of everything he makes to the church. He believes in God, but is that kind of belief a saving faith? He was offended by fellow Watergate conspirator, Chuck Colson's interest in his spiritual condition.

Both Colson and Liddy were ranking officials in the Nixon administration who served time for their part in the cover-up of the burglary of the Democratic Party Headquarters in the Watergate Hotel. Liddy was convicted on nine counts, including his part in the actual break-in. I have heard Chuck Colson and read his books and while I am not qualified to judge another person's spiritual condition, it seems that when I hear Colson I am hear a person who is speaking from experiential knowledge of God. When I hear Liddy I hear one who speaks in part from memory of a parochial school education.

2. A living faith illustrated, 2:15-17.

2:15 - IF. Always practical, James illustrates in verses 15-17 the point made in verse 14. "*If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food...*" The average believer does not show his faith through mighty deeds comparable to those acts of faith in Hebrews 11, but by simple, practical deeds as they are needed from day to day. Many of the poor in America at the beginning of the Twenty First Century live far better than most affluent people have lived since the Fall of man. What civilization has ever had "earned income credit" before? Producers are taxed an higher and higher rates in order to achieve in America what Communism could never achieve in the USSR. At least Marx taught "To each according to his needs, from each according to his ability." In America producer are too often taxed to support non-producers. Few have a problem with helping those who

cannot work, but understandably oppose working to support those who can work but will not.

2:16 - AND ONE OF YOU SAYS. Suppose there is a genuine need in your community and you say to them, *"Go in peace, be warmed and be filled, 'and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?"* We call this paying lip service; we recognize it and loathe it - in others. But how often are we guilty of doing something like that and then trying to rationalize away our guilt? Would I ever be guilty of anything like this? Never! Yet...

Earlier in my ministry, it was not unusual for some stranger to knock on the door or ring the door bell and ask for help. We were a little more innocent in those days, for one thing. For another, we had not moved very far into the post-Christian era in America. People went to Sunday School and to worship services and were often confronted with the question, how do you know when you may be entertaining an angel without being aware of it? I am serious! A lot of people thought like that in those days. More to the point, when there was an opportunity to help someone many of us were recalling the words of our Lord, "I was hungry and you fed me..."

The problem was that the major highways, like highway 80 across Louisiana, or highway 82 across Mississippi were the favorite routes of migrant workers who were continually trying - desperately, against all hope, it seemed - to get from Florida to California to pick fruit and vegetables. Some of them became professional bums, stopping in every town and city along the way to try out their latest sad story on every pastor they could find. No, they could not get the car all the way up to his house, it had run out of gas a block away. No, they didn't need to let the pastor's wife prepare a meal. No, the baby was really hungry, had not had any milk all day, but she was in the car down the road. If you will just let me borrow some money, any amount, I will buy milk for the baby and enough gas to get to Florida - did I say Florida, I meant California - and I will sent the money to you at the end of the first week. I wonder why some of the ever bothered to pick fruit, this had to be more profitable.

One pastor got wise when the same family came to his door with the same story they had used three months earlier. If you make up your mind not to let people like this take advantage of you, how do you know you will not turn away someone who really is in need? Offer them work! That works wonders with some of them. "The Sheriff is a good friend of mine and he knows most of the farmers in the area. Let me call him and see if he knows anyone who may be hiring workers?" I never had anyone to take me up on that one. However, there were times when I gave a few people money or helped with food for the simple reason that I had rather let someone con me out of a few dollars than to refuse a needy family - with a hungry baby in the car down the road. Out of Gas. It's cold. Oh, the baby's sick.

I gave money to one man because when he asked a teenager for money the youth brought him to my house and stood looking at me as if to say, "I knew you would do something." The man promised that just as soon as he got to Greenwood, Mississippi he would sent me the money. My doubts were justified, I never heard from him. But I was not about to discourage this young man

who belonged to another church, but knew me as his grandmother's pastor.

2:17 - FAITH, IF IT HAS NO WORKS, IS DEAD. A workless faith is a worthless faith.

Wind is not wind unless it is blowing, and faith is not faith unless it is working.

The point is, a dead faith is no faith. A living, active faith is not just wishful thinking. Once when I was a youth I remember my mother coming home from a meeting at church with a story that James calls to mind. In this meeting there was a lengthy discussion of how they might help a needy family in the community. The parents were not very clean - okay, they were not clean at all. They were not especially industrious or ambitious. They were in fact, lazy, filthy, and ignorant. The ladies were almost unanimous in their commitment to provide food and clothing. One lady, who never hesitated to make her opinions known on any subject, opposed the whole idea. "You can't help people like that! If you give them something today, tomorrow they will be right back where they are now, looking for another hand-out. I see them when they go to the store and when they have any money they buy candy for their kids."

The pastor's wife made the point that those children needed clothes and that they should not be denied food and clothes because of the ignorance of their parents. The ladies agreed. The lady who was so opposed to helping quickly volunteered to take the money and go to "The Bargain Center", and buy the clothes and deliver them. She did her "good deed", but was this an act of faith, or were there ulterior motives. Knowing the lady as I did I could believe that by the time she was finished the needy family was convinced that it was her idea from the beginning. This story should challenge us to consider why we do what we do, even when we are doing good deeds.

B. True Religion Requires a Living Faith, 2:18-20.

1. True faith manifests itself in service, 2:18.

2:18 - BUT SOME MAY SAY. *"But someone may well say, 'You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.'"* James began this hypothetical argument in 2:14, and now he brings a new person into the debate - a person who takes James' position. This hypothetical speaker agrees with James that you cannot have faith without works. The essence of his argument is that since only God can see faith, there must be some way of letting other people know that you have it, and what it means to have it. The only way you affirm your faith to another person is through your good works. The Lord does not need to see the works to know you have faith because he has already justified you by His grace, through your faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:33; Eph. 2:8).

The point here is not how a person is brought into right relationship with God but how to let other people know you have faith in Him. We must never forget who these initial recipients were, nor the times in which they lived. Any appeal to Abraham would get their attention. When God

tested Abraham , He already knew what was in his heart (Gen. 22:1ff.). “God did not justify Abraham because he was willing to sacrifice Isaac. God was satisfied long before by Abraham’s faith in the fact that God would give him a son. What God really wanted was for Abraham to show the people around him that he believed God.”^{lxxi} Good works do not save anyone; they just show others that the individual is saved. You know a tree is alive when you see its leaves and fruit, but you can be sure there was life in it long before you ever saw the fruit or even the leaves.

SHOW ME YOUR FAITH. The challenger’s statement ends before the first use of the word “show” in this verse. James’s reply begins there. This is not an invitation to all believers to show off their faith. But to the person who says he has faith but does not manifest it in obedience and service, James says, “show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” Faith that does not lead to works is dead faith (verses 17, 26), not living faith. There is a challenge in verse 18: “Show me your faith without your works!” Who can do that? No one. It is impossible! The only way faith is manifested in the believer’s life is by practical loving obedience to the Word of God, manifested in the good works we do and the bad things we avoid.

Wind is not wind unless it is blowing, and faith is not faith unless it is working.

2. Saving faith is more than acknowledging His existence, 2:19.

2:19 - YOU BELIEVE THAT GOD IS ONE. “*You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.*” Do you give assent to the existence of God? Do you believe there is but one God? Well, Congratulations! “You do well,” James says, “the demons also believe, and shudder.” Matthew 8:29 and Acts 16:17 reveal how the demons acknowledge Jesus during His earthly ministry. Even the demons have dead faith! (v. 17). If they trembled before the human Jesus, they surely tremble before the risen Lord. It might surprise some people who talk about faith to discover that they have the same kind of faith that demons have.

More and more people in America are becoming more and more uncomfortable with Jesus Christ. They are not so offended by the use of the word “God” as long as we do not get too specific. During the presidential race of 2000, George W. Bush shared testimony when it was requested, Al Gore simply responded that he did not have a written testimony. Bush’s testimony had all the elements of a life-changing experience with Jesus Christ. After news of Bush’s close personal relationship with Christ, Al Gore selected senator Joseph Lieberman as a running mate. Lieberman filled the airwaves with “God.” It seemed that he had been selected to counter George Bush’s references to God and Christ. It was as though he was trying to out-God George Bush. Some people were astute enough to realize that it was not “God” that the media did not want to hear, because that left the door open for them to relate the term to any god they chose. There was no mistaking George Bush’s God - Jesus Christ. It is the name “Jesus” that offends the liberal media.

GOD IS ONE. “The unity of God was a fundamental belief in Judaism, but if that belief did not

produce good deeds it was no better than the monotheism of the demons.”^{lxxii} This kind of faith will not save them. Muslims believe there is one god (Allah), and they accuse Christians of believing in three Gods - the Father, the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit. They cannot understand - or will not accept our belief in the Trinity, the great three-in-one God: One is essence, three in personality.

3. A faith that does not work is dead, 2:20.

2:20 - FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS USELESS. “*But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?*” The NRSV renders it, “Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is barren?” The KJV has, “Faith without works is dead.” Faith without works is not faith at all. Billy Graham had the following to say about faith and works and their relationship to each other:

There really is no conflict between faith and works. In the Christian life they go together like inhaling and exhaling. Faith is taking the Gospel in; works is taking the Gospel out. Actually, what James is saying is: you can't have one without the other.

The book of James balances off this matter of faith and works, and reminds us that the Christian must have both. True, we are not saved by works, but James reminds us also that we are not saved if good works do not follow. Some people argue this point so vehemently that it almost becomes like the old argument of which comes first, the chicken or the egg. The word "believe" comes from two words, "be" and "live". Faith helps us to "be," spiritually. But after we receive life, it is to find expression in Christian works and deeds. To show that there is no conflict in the Scriptures between the two, Paul, the advocate of faith speaks of "being rich in works," and James, the exponent of works, says, "rich in faith." Why be content with either when God has provided for, and says we must have both.^{lxxiii}

C. Abraham's Faith Was Vindicated By Works, 2:21-23.

1. With Abraham faith worked, 2:21-22.

2:21 - ABRAHAM OUR FATHER. “*Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?*” This question has been held to be directly opposed to Paul's statement that Abraham's faith, not his works, caused God to declare him righteous (Rom. 4:1-5).

Paul, however, was arguing for the *priority* of faith. James argued for the *proof* of faith. Paul declared that Abraham had faith, and was therefore justified, or declared righteous (Gen. 15:6), prior to circumcision (Gen. 17:11; cf. Rom. 4:9). James

explained that Abraham's faith was evident in his practice of Isaac's sacrifice (Gen. 22:12), and he was therefore justified, or declared righteous. Works serve as the barometer of justification, while faith is the basis for justification.^{lxxiv}

In this passage, James uses two well known examples, Abraham and Rahab, to prove that a saving faith is a working faith, that faith produces works. God's promise to Abraham included three specific components; the Land of Promise, descendants more numerous than the sand of the sea and the stars of the heavens (through Isaac), and a Seed Who would bless all nations, (Gen. 12- 2).

JUSTIFIED BY WORKS. Abraham believed God, and this faith was accounted unto Him as righteousness (Gen. 15:1-6; Rom. 4:1-5).

Then God asked Abraham to sacrifice that son Isaac on the altar! Abraham had faith in God, and therefore was not afraid to obey Him. Hebrews 11:17-19 indicates that Abraham believed that God could even raise Isaac from the dead! In short, Abraham proved his faith by his works. His obedience to the Word was evidence of his faith in the Word.^{lxxv}

Paul wrote to the Galatians, "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham" (Gal. 3:6-7). Those who are familiar with Paul's metaphor of justification (metaphor of the court room) may be surprised to find James using the term in a different sense. In Paul's writings, "to justify" means to declare a sinner righteous in the sight of God; to declare him just or righteous before God.

Here in James it means "to vindicate or "show to be righteous" before God and men. Abraham's justification in Paul's sense is recorded in Gen. 15:6; Abraham's justification in James's sense took place 30 or more years later in the patriarch's crowning act of obedience in offering Isaac (Gen. 22). By this act he proved the reality of his Gen. 15 faith.^{lxxvi}

2:22 - FAITH WAS WORKING WITH HIS WORKS. "*You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected.*" In a sense Paul is emphasizing the root (faith) and James the fruit (works) of our justification (salvation). There is no conflict between Paul and James - this is not an "epistle of straw." Genuine faith is affirmed by our works.

FAITH WAS PERFECTED. "Perfected" denotes completion of fulfillment. Faith is both completed and manifested in actions. Faith is the force behind the act. An acorn has within it everything it needs to germinate and grow into a full grown oak tree, but one would hardly look at it and call it a tree. The full grown tree shows that the little seedling that sprang from the acorn has now reached maturity or completion. Good deeds show that one's faith is complete, mature, full grown.

The faith Abraham had before his deed was not defective. He had been redeemed by the grace of God, through the faith God gave him so that he could receive His grace. The only thing that is compatible with God's grace is faith, and the only kind of faith that is compatible with God's grace is the faith which God supplies. No one can claim any credit. Abraham's faith was present; he knew it and God knew it, but in his offering Isaac he demonstrated that his faith to others.

I found an interesting statement in one of the commentaries I consulted. The writer made that statement that even true faith will die if the person does not continue in the spirit of obedience. Is he saying that if he does not walk in the spirit of obedience he will lose his salvation? Some would not have a problem with that, but I reject it completely. Through Jesus Christ we receive eternal life, not conditional life. This assurance is stressed over and over in the New Testament. If however, he means that if the believer does not walk in the spirit of obedience he will lose something of the expression of that faith, I will agree. That is called backsliding, walking on the flesh. This is serious and only God can restore the backslider. There is no way the backslider can demonstrate his faith until he is forgiven and restored to a right relationship with God. But he does not lose his salvation. If he got what he had coming to him he might, but grace is not giving us what we have coming to us.

2. Abraham Believed God, 2:23.

2:23 - THE SCRIPTURE WAS FULFILLED. *"And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God."* Scripture must be fulfilled. This simple statement echoes an earlier statement by Jesus, Who once, "I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures must be fulfilled" (Mark 14:4, KJV).

ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD. It is important to note that James did not say Abraham believed in God. He did not say that he believed there is a god. What he said is Abraham believed God. There is a difference. When I was a student at Mississippi College, I led a mission trip to the Hinds County Jail in Jackson each Thursday afternoon. I also preached at the Mississippi State Penitentiary every Sunday morning. One Thursday afternoon I took a number of Baptist Student Union (BSU) students to the county jail where I assigned different students various cells, and then took the last one myself. I was talking with two twelve year old boys from New Orleans when I was interrupted by someone who had been talking with a man in another cell on a little farther down the corridor. When I looked up the other student asked, "Will you change places with me? I was trying to talk with that man but he became angry and came over to the bars. I thought he was going to try to reach through the bars to get to me."

As the leader of the group I had no choice but to trade places with him. When I stopped in

front of Mike's cell, I stopped and introduced myself. I discovered that he was from a small town not too far from where I had gone to high school. After a few minutes we established a rapport for which I thanked the Lord. After a period of time I asked, "Mike do you believe there is a God?" He said, Oh, Yeah. I believe in God.? I showed him my Bible and asked, "Do you believe this is the Word of God?" He assured me that he did and I asked if I might read something from it. After reading from the Scripture, I said, "Mike, you have told me that you believe in God. Now I would like to ask you another question: "Do you believe God?" Mike sat there a full minute (seemed like an hour), then got up and started walking across the cell toward the bars. I mentally calculated the distance to the wall behind me and was relieved to know that I could back up farther than he could reach, so I felt rather secure.

As Mike approached the bars he suddenly stopped and asked, "Johnny, can you get a Bible." He got mine! I do not remember what ever happened to Mike, or to the Bible I gave him, but I was excited when I realized that he understood the difference between believing in God and really believing God.

RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. His faith was reckoned to him as righteousness "and he was called the friend of God." This is the imputed righteousness of which Paul writes so poignantly in Romans. Paul used Genesis 15:6 to show that God justified Abraham simply by faith:

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness (Romans 4:1-5).

James used the same verse to say that Abraham was justified by God, evidenced by what he did. James and Paul are in full agreement on this subject. "Paul was talking about the seed of faith, while James was talking about full-grown faith. Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac was more than just obedience. It was an expression of faith, and real faith is not full-grown until it is expressed in action."^{lxxvii}

FRIEND OF GOD. This title comes from 2 Chron. 20:7 and Isa. 41:8. What a rich term - "friend." How much richer it is to be called "the friend of God!" What does it mean to be called "the friend of God"? Clarke held that it is the highest character ever given to man.

As among friends every thing is in common; so God took Abraham into intimate communion with himself, and poured out upon him the choicest of his blessings: for as God can never be in want, because he possesses all things; so Abraham his friend

could never be destitute, because God was his friend.^{lxxviii}

Abraham was known as “The friend of God” because the people could see his faith actually being worked out in his life. “He showed that he loved God by what he did, and God demonstrated his love for Abraham by justifying him. This kind of friendship with God is still available on the same terms (cf. John 15:14, 15).”^{lxxix}

3. Faith works, 2:24.

2:24 - BY FAITH ALONE. “*You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.*” There are three theories of Justification [In *The Bible Notebook Series*, studies in Romans, Ephesians, and Galatians by this writer all include this emphasis].

1. **JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS.** The Scripture clearly rejects this approach.. In Ephesians 2:9, Paul writes that our salvation is “not of works, lest anyone should boast.” In Galatians 2:16, he writes, “ nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.”

2. **JUSTIFICATION BY A COMBINATION OF WORKS AND GRACE.** Paul was inspired to write to the Romans that grace and works are mutually exclusive because the are absolutely incompatible in regards to our salvation. He wrote, “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace” (Rom. 11:6). He wrote, in Gal. 3:3, “Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”

3. **JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE ALONE.** In Ephesians 2:8-10, we read, “For **by grace you have been saved through faith**; and that not of yourselves, it is the **gift of God**; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” No one is saved by good works but everyone is saved for good works.

As we have seen in Galatians 2:16, “...a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ”

Verse 24 summarizes the entire subject. The faith which does not lead to works is not saving faith. Warren Wiersbe writes:

Sad to say, there are multitudes of professing Christians and church members who have this “dead faith.” They profess faith with their lips (v. 14), but their lives deny

what they profess. This is the same truth Paul explained when writing to Titus. “They profess that they know God, but in works they deny Him” (Titus 1:16). Real Christians are “a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14). This is why Paul warns, “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith; prove yourselves” (2 Cor. 13:5, NKJV). This does not mean that a true Christian never sins (1 John 1:5-10). But it does mean that a true Christian does not make sinning the habit of his or her life. A true Christian bears fruit for God’s glory and walks so as to please God.^{lxxx}

D. Preeminence of Faith Reiterated, 2:25-26.

1. Rahab was an unlikely example, 2:25.

2:25 - RAHAB. *“In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?”* James’ second illustration is Rahab (Josh. 2; 6:17-27). This woman was a sinner, yet her name is listed in the genealogy of Christ (Matt. 1:5). Hebrews 11:31 reveals that she was a woman of faith. She lived in the condemned city of Jericho, and she heard that God had judged the enemies of Israel.

She believed the report she heard about God (Josh. 2:10-11), for “faith comes by hearing” (Rom. 10:17, NKJV). Note that she also had assurance (Josh. 2:9, 21). Keep in mind that Rahab was a believer in the God of Israel before the two spies came to her house. It was her reception and protection of the two spies that proved her faith in God. She risked her own life to identify herself with Israel. Because of her faith, proved by her works, she and her family (who also believed) were delivered from the judgment that came to all the people in Jericho.^{lxxxii}

2. Faith without works is dead, 2:26.

2:26 - FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD. *“For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”* The whole matter of faith and works is summed up in Eph. 2:8-10:

- (1) The work God does for us (salvation)—“For by grace you have been saved...not of works”.
- (2) The work God does in us (sanctification)—“For we are His workmanship”.
- (3) The work God does through us (service)—“created...for good works”.

Matthew Henry, wrote of observing in this verse the wonderful power of faith in changing sinners.

Rahab's conduct proved her faith to be living, or having power; it showed that she believed with her heart, not merely by an assent of the understanding. Let us then take heed, for the best works, without faith, are dead; they want root and principle.

By faith any thing we do is really good; as done in obedience to God, and aiming at his acceptance: the root is as though it were dead, when there is no fruit. Faith is the root, good works are the fruits.^{lxxxii}

CHAPTER III

I. PURE RELIGION AND THE TONGUE, 3:1-12.

A. The Tongue and the Teacher, 3:1.

3:1 - MY BRETHREN. “*Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.*” With “my brethren James give a clear indication that he is about to introduce a new topic. In doing so he wants to be fully identify with them as a Jewish believer in Jesus Christ.

TEACHERS. It seems that too many of the new Jewish Christians aspired to the position of teacher, possibly assuming something of the rank and admiration given to Rabbis.

It is doubtful that the reference here is to official teachers of the apostolic or prophetic status. These are the unofficial teachers (*didaskaloi*) in the synagogue meetings of the church family where much latitude was given for even strangers to speak. Paul frequently used this courtesy given visitors. James’ complaint was simply that too many believers were overly anxious to speak up and show off.^{lxxxiii}

There is another consideration here. Christian teachers must be very careful with their words. This applies doubly to the pastor/teacher, because of the added potential for either edification or error. There are two points that should be considered here. First of all, the teacher must be very sure that what he says is the truth. Paul wrote to Timothy, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.” (2 Tim. 2:15). Secondly, the teacher must guard against false teachings. In other words, he must teach that which is true and at the same time abstain that which is false. His, or her words will eventually reveal what is in the heart.

STRICTER JUDGMENT. By the word “we”, James includes himself with those who face a more strict judgment if they should fail both to teach the truth and to obey it. James has in mind the judgment of God here. The listener must listen to the teacher with an attitude of discernment. When Paul and Silas were forced out of Thessalonica, they went down to Berea, where they went to the local synagogue. “Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

Luke wrote, “Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

Those who listen to Christian teachers should listen with a spirit of discernment, judging both the words of the teacher and his character. But that judgment is not the primary concern of the Christian pastor or teacher. If he is primarily concerned with pleasing or impressing the people, he is a hypocrite and he faces a greater judgment. If he does not accurately handle the word of truth, he will be judged by God. “A teacher’s condemnation is greater because, having professed to have a clear knowledge of duty, he is all the more bound to obey it.”^{lxxxiv} The pastor/teacher must understand both his calling and his accountability. The lay-teacher will also “incur a stricter judgment.”

In a letter to the editor of the Monroe, LA *NewsStar*, October 15, 2000, a man, whether trying to be clever, humorous, or philosophical, made the claim that evolution has been scientifically proved. If it had ever been scientifically proved, why are they still calling it a theory? The man went on to ask, if the creation should be taught in school, why should evolution not be taught in the church? Only a lost person could seriously ask such a question, so to give them man the benefit of a doubt, let us assume that he thought he thought this was humorous. Of course, we pay taxes to support public schools, but lost people do not pay taxes to support the church. This verse answers the man’s question.

The Cod-called preacher is called to proclaim the “Thus saith the Lord,” not the thus reasoneth the mind of man. We must proclaim the truth, not a theory. The fact that some may lie to children at school does not mean that we should lie to them at church. Furthermore, Jesus declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” He did not say, “I am the way, the theory, and the life.” Jesus also declared, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free” (John 8:32). He did not say, “You shall know the myth and the myth shall set you free.”

B. The Tongue Reveals Our Maturity, 3:2.

3:2 - IF ONE DOES NOT STUMBLE. *“For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.”* The primary emphasis here does not seem to be on one who deliberately develops a false system of theology. When we stumble, it is usually by accident - because we were not watching where we were going. A generation of television viewers were entertained by Dick Van Dyke’s “stumble” in the “lead-in” to the “Dick Van Dyke Show.” A great actor, he faked a stumble that both entertained us and reminded us of how easily we may stumble when we are distracted or when we are not paying attention. Teachers may stumble because they are distracted, because they have been misled, of because they are not prepared.

IN WHAT HE SAYS. “James sees the teaching situation as the most difficult place to be

consistently free from blame in what you say. That is why not many should become teachers, especially those who have trouble with their tongue.”^{lxxxv} The teacher may stumble in ways that harm only himself, but if he stumbles in what he teaches he may cause others to sin.

A PERFECT MAN. Ryrie says “The theme of verses 1-12 is found in the second clause: If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man. Perfect means ‘mature, of full moral and spiritual growth.’ The word for man is male, indicating that men particularly need to guard the use of the tongue.”^{lxxxvi} The Greek word (*teleios*) for perfect means maturity, denoting completion, that which has reached its end. The *teleios* of an acorn is a giant oak tree; the *teleios* of a little boy is a full grown man. The *teleios* of a “babe in Christ” is a mature Christian.

C. The Power of the Tongue, 3:3-5.

3:3 - THE BIT. “*Now if we put the bits into the horses’ mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well.*” We can control horses with a small bit, but the tongue is a greater challenge.

To control his whole body, that is, every other part of himself, as a man does a horse by the bridle. The word rendered “to bridle,” means to lead or guide with a bit; then to rein in, to check, to moderate, to restrain. A man always has complete government over himself if he has the entire control of his tongue. It is that by which he gives expression to his thoughts and passions; and if that is kept under proper restraint, all the rest of his members are as easily controlled as the horse is by having the control of the bit.^{lxxxvii}

The unbridled tongue is a destructive power, easily given to slander, profanity, gossip, lying, and false teaching.

3:4 - LOOK AT THE SHIPS. “*Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires.*” The rudder is a small part of the ship, but it is with the rudder that the pilot controls the direction of the ship.

A ship is a large object. It seems to be unmanageable by its vastness, and it is also impelled by driving storms. Yet it is easily managed by a small rudder; and he that has control of that, has control of the ship itself. So with the tongue. It is a small member as compared with the body; in its size not unlike the rudder as compared with the ship. Yet the proper control of the tongue in respect to its influence on the whole man, is not unlike the control of the rudder in its power over the ship.^{lxxxviii}

The ship is “so great” - that is, so great in themselves, and in comparison with the rudder. Even large vessels, which seem all but uncontrollable, are in fact controlled by a very small thing. The tongue, like the bit in a horse’s mouth and the rudder of a ship, is small in comparison to what it

controls. “Yet the ship is completely at the mercy of the pilot’s whims and wishes, just as the horse is compelled to respond to the rider who holds the reins. We usually speak with the same sort of impulsive instinct that motivates the pilot or the rider.”^{lxxxix}

3:5 - SO ALSO THE TONGUE. “*So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!*” A forest fire which destroys thousands of acres of prime timber is often started by a spark (“small fire”). Years ago, singer Johnny Cash made the headlines when a spark from his vehicle set off a forest fire while he was vacationing in California. The tongue is a small part of the body, but it can, and frequently does set off a destructive force that leaves the mind boggled. The point here is that, though a small member of the body, the tongue often commits the whole body to a course of action. Once again I am reminded of the verse:

The tongue a tiny member is, which lights a mighty flame.
The jungle beast can man control, the tongue he cannot tame.

BOASTS OF GREAT THINGS. The tongue is capable of great things, whether of a good or evil kind. “He seems to refer here to the powerful and all commanding eloquence of the Greek orators: they could carry the great mob whithersoever they wished; calm them to peaceableness and submission, or excite them to furious sedition.”^{xc}

D. The Potential of the Tongue for Evil, 3:6-8.

1. It is a fire, vs. 6.

3:6 - THE TONGUE IS A FIRE. “*And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.*” When a fire breaks out in the tinder-dry forest it is soon out of control. During the summer of the year 2000 firefighters from across the nation have been called in to help fight forest fires in the west and the mid-west. Scores of houses are destroyed when an out of control fire sweeps across a forest, jumping from one scope of woods to another, destroying everything in its path.

One Sunday evening during the drought of 2000, (late August) a beeper went off just as we were beginning our evening worship service. Someone checked and told me that there were forest fires in the area. I told them to signal me if we needed to dismiss our people and within fifteen minutes we were leaving, some to fight the fires and others to offer support. It seems that someone was pulling a boat trailer down the highway with a flat on the trailer. Sparks from the metal wheel ignited grass fires along the road for several miles. Some of the fires got into the forests around us and threatened houses all over the area. Spared that fate when the wind died down, we give the Lord full credit, and the fire fighters our appreciation. It was hard to believe that sparks from that one wheel could start dozens of fires, some of which swept through many acres of pine trees. One neighbor reported that the flames reached forty-five to fifty feet high as they approached the shop behind his house.

The tongue is a raging fire, which in countless ways can set on fire an individual heart, a family, a church, or even a nation. See Proverbs 16:27.

And the “soot” from the fire can defile everybody involved. When the Spirit came at Pentecost, there were tongues of fire from heaven to enable the Christians to witness; but it is also possible for the tongue to be “set on fire from hell” (v. 6). James also compares the tongue to a fierce and poisonous beast that cannot be tamed. No *man* can tame the tongue; only God can control it through His Spirit. The tongue is restless, unruly (that is, it cannot be ruled). What poison it can spread! A spiritual tongue is medicine (Prov. 12:18).^{xci}

Another reason the tongue is such a fitting metaphor is that, like a fire, once it breaks out, it may soon be out of control. Once a word is spoken no one can control its effect and it cannot be taken back. Homes are regularly wrecked and lives destroyed by a loose tongue. The tongue has spawned both murder and wars. Envy, greed, covetousness, and jealousy are often the products of an evil tongue. Politicians depend upon experts to keep them from using words that will destroy their careers. They also employ “spin-masters” who will seek to turn their opponents’ words against them. In this day of modern communication we know the potential of the tongue for destruction and misery.

Relief pitcher John Rocker of the Atlanta Braves “popped off” to a reporter about fans in New York - he thought it was off the record - and was surprised to see his words in *Sports Illustrated*.

The media really played it up and despite the fact that he may have been joking, the consequences have gone beyond anything he could have imagined. In August, 2000, Vice President Al Gore’s campaign manager, a black woman, called Gore’s Republican opponent in the presidential race a “white cracker.” The liberal media chose to ignore it - the same media that used the words of baseball player to fan a social and political forest fire throughout America.

WORLD OF INIQUITY. The tongue is a little world of iniquity in itself. This is a very expressive phrase, not uncommon even today. We hear expressions like, “a world full of trouble,” or “I have a world full of problems.” What James is saying here is that all kinds of evil that are in the world “are exhibited there in miniature in the tongue; it seems to concentrate all sorts of iniquity that exist on the earth.”^{xcii} What evil is there which may not be started, or fomented by the tongue? And what problem is there that may not be exacerbated by the wrong use of the tongue?

With all the good which it does, who can estimate the potential for evil? Think of all the ways the tongue can be used to take a spark and fan it into a flame that is soon out of control. Study the list below and see if you can recall times when you have seen someone else sin in this manner.

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Gossip | 2. Slander |
| 3. Profanity | 4. Obscenity |
| 5. Flattery | 6. Lying |
| 7. Planting doubts | 8. Causing pain |

9. Judging

10. Deception

Now complete this exercise by prayerfully considering a time when you have been guilty of some of these sins. Have you repented?

The tongue is involved in many other sins than those listed above. What about seducing others to try alcohol, drugs, or immorality, especially the young and innocent? The tongue is also used to cause suspicion and alienation among people, hatred, anxiety, even murder. Recently, we have heard a lot of talk about the “politics of personal destruction.” Sadly, this is not always limited to secular politics. There has been a lot of name calling within churches and denominations. Political liberals have been attacking conservative Christians since Ronald Reagan’s first year in the White House. They fear “Right-wing Christian Fundamentalist”, or “Right-wing Extremists.” It is interesting that few of those critics are alarmed by left-wing extremists.

I remember reading an article - it must have been around 1980 - that stated that language in America was becoming more profane and more obscene, and all indications suggested that it would continue to get worse. We indeed live among a people “of unclean lips” (Is. 6:5). Sadly, many professing believers use the language of the world. Children hear it of TV and our youth are entertained by filth in the movies. Our society is bombarded by music that is often laced with profanity and vulgarity. Attractive, well educated young adults and their children casually use crude expression about body parts and body functions that many of find repulsive. In my parent’s day someone would have had his mouth washed out with soap.

DEFILES THE WHOLE BODY. One may become infected by a microscopic organism which quickly spreads through the whole body, incapacitating the individual for days. There are communicable diseases contracted, such as some of the current venereal diseases, which, once contracted will remain with that individual for the rest of his or her life. The tongue has the potential for that kind of misery in an individual’s life - and in the body of Christ.

SETS ON FIRE THE COURSE OF OUR LIFE, AND IS SET ON FIRE BY HELL. As wind blows the raging fires through forests, the tongue sets in action attitudes and actions that will follow one throughout his life. How is that fire set - it “is set on fire by hell.” It is of the devil. The tongue is only the fuse; the source of the deadly fire is **hell** itself.”^{xci} Here “hell” is literally, “Gehenna,” a place in the Valley of Hinnom south of Jerusalem where human sacrifice had been offered (Jer. 7:31) and where continuous burning of garbage made it a fitting illustration of the lake of fire.

2. The tongue is by man untamable, 3:7-8.

3:7 - TAMED BY THE HUMAN RACE. “*For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race.*” What does James mean by “tamed?” Does it not mean to make both controllable and useful? Human beings have tamed animals so that they might render service, provide companionship, and bring pleasure.

Man has tamed all sorts of dangerous dispositions and peculiar natures in the animal world. Notice that James classifies wild life in four families: animals, birds, reptiles, and fish. With gentle but firm patience man has been able to subdue animal nature and even to improve it for his own use. However, the Greek case leaves room for an alternate reading here, which suggests that the animal world has “allowed itself” to be tamed by man.^{xciv}

3:8 - NO ONE CAN TAME THE TONGUE. “*But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.*” Not one single person, regardless of all the positive qualities he or she may possess - patience, gentleness, and humility, compassion - can tame either his own tongue or that of another person. It is now that the impact of what James has said in verse 2 becomes apparent. The Greek suggests something that is restless and incapable of restraint. “Estius observed that despite a double barricade of lips and teeth the tongue is always breaking through the barrier to lash out and destroy people.”^{xcv} [NCWB]. Adam Clarke writes, “No cunning, persuasion, or influence has ever been able to silence it. Nothing but the grace of God, excision, or death, can bring it under subjection.”^{xcvi}

To tame the tongue means to render it useful and beneficial. Fallen man has never been able to tame the tongue. Sadly, many Christians to little better than lost people. There are many professing Christians who use profane or vulgar language, are guilty of gossip, slander, backbiting, egotistical boasting, and arrogant denouncement of others. It is worth repeating:

The tongue a tiny member is, which lights a mighty flame.

The jungle beast can man control, the tongue he cannot tame.

Is it possible that some Christians today use language that would have offended non-Christians a century ago? If someone had used certain profane or obscene terms in the presence of ladies or children, someone would have made it a point to call him down. If he used certain terms in addressing a neighbor he would have needed medical help. And the one thing you never called another man was a liar - his word was his bond. He traded on it.

When the Watergate tapes were released Americans were shocked that President Nixon would use such profanity. On the evening of his inauguration, microphones picked up President Clinton’ angry diatribe in which he was using God’s name in vain. Personal guards, state troopers, and other have reported that Mrs. Hillary Clinton’ speech is laced with profanity and vulgarity. Does God not expect more of those who profess to follow Him?

FULL OF DEADLY POISON. The tongue is “a restless evil and full of deadly poison.” I well remember that active church member who would proudly boast, “I’ll tell you right now, I will tell you what I think!” Have you ever heard a believer boast of his, or her possessions. His connections? His courage? His wisdom? What about the person who smugly tells everyone how he gave the clerk at the mall or the mechanic at the shop a tongue lashing? Some believers are hyper critical of others, and some just seem to like to fuss, but nothing amazes me any more that the person who “puts down” his friend, or the Christian who gossips about someone she insists she loves.

The tongue is never more venomous than when it injects its deadly poison into another person or group by means of gossip or slander. If a rattlesnake bites a friend, we crush the head of the snake and minister to the victim. When a gossip injects venom into another person, church members too often pat the snake on the head and crush the victim. When we do so, we share in their guilt.

ILLUSTRATION - SLANDER:

Robert Cook, President of King's College once related a true story from the early years of his ministry. Evidently at that time he had been receiving some rather pointed criticism. In fact, it had become of such great concern to him that he sought the counsel of a friend, the beloved Bible expositor and pastor, Harry A. Ironside. Pouring out his heart, Bob Cook asked what he should do about the denunciations being made against him. He wanted to know how to handle them. Ironside gave the following wise counsel: "Bob, if the criticism about you is true, mend your ways! If it isn't, forget about it!"

The Rev. B. Jacobs of Cambridgeport could, when necessary, administer reproof quite forcibly, though the gentleness of his character was always seen in the manner in which it was done. Some young ladies at his house were one day talking about one of their female friends. As he entered the room, he heard the epithets "odd," "singular," etc. applied. He asked and was told the name of the young lady in question, and then said, very gravely, "Yes, she is an odd young lady--she is a very odd young lady. I consider her extremely singular." He then added very impressively, "She was never heard to speak ill of an absent friend." The rebuke was not forgotten by those who heard it.^{xcvii}

In my unpublished verse-by-verse commentary on the Book of Romans I have a quote from the late Dr. J. P. McBeth (An Exegetical and Practical Commentary on Romans) on the tongue. Commenting on Romans 3:13ff, he wrote:

Vulgarity (Rom. 3:13) is the most obnoxious form of speech. Flattery (3:13b) is the most hypocritical form of speech. Slander (3:13c) is the most deadly form of speech. And profanity (3:14) is the most inexcusable form of speech. There may be temptation for the first three; but there is never a temptation for a person to profane God's name.

It is a characteristic of man to sin by temptation; and it is a characteristic of Satan to sin without temptation; therefore, to use profanity is to sin in similitude to the devil.^{xcviii}

E. The Tongue Is Inconsistent, 3:9-12.

3:9 - WE BLESS OUR LORD. *“With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God...”* No one has ever used his tongue to bless the Lord more than the ancient Jew. When ever God’s name was mentioned, a pious Jew responded, “Blessed be He!” In his daily prayer ritual he said, “Blessed be Thou, O God” over fifty times a day. “The tongue is capable of rehearsing the praises, and setting forth the glories, of the eternal King: what a pity that it should ever be employed in a contrary work! It can proclaim and vindicate the truth of God, and publish the Gospel of peace and good will among men: what a pity that it should ever be employed in falsehoods, calumny, or in the cause of infidelity!”^{xci} With the same tongue people one moment “bless our Lord and Father,” and then curse men, and blaspheme God.

This does not mean that everyone is guilty of blessing our Lord and that every person curses others. He does not mean that it is always the same person is doing this, but the same organ - the tongue - is doing it. Sadly, it is often the same person who is doing it. A friend who is an optometrist told me about a lady who came into his examining room with a super pious attitude, spraying the room with religious clichés. Every sentence seemed to be punctuated with God, Jesus, and “Praise the Lord.” That ended when the apparatus he closed in front of her eyes caught an eyelash implant and promptly dis-implanted it! The woman poured forth a stream of profanity and obscenity that shocked the doctor. He quickly recovered and said, “That is no problem. I can replace it.” He remarked as he related it to me, “I had never done it before, but I did it then.”

IN THE LIKENESS OF GOD. Ryrie comments on this: “The divine image has been marred by sin but not totally obliterated. Our being made in the image of God is the basis for not cursing our fellow man.”^c When I enrolled at Mississippi College I met Luther Street, a student who lived very near my home. I lived in Tunica County and he lived in Quitman County. He “put in a good word for me” and I was employed by the Quitman County ASCS (USDA) to “measure cotton,” even though we seldom actually measured cotton. We plotted fields on an aerial photograph so that people in the office could determine the acreage with a planimeter. After a few visits with the Streets, I received a standing invitation to stop by for dinner any time I was in the area. Before too long, if I did not stop by, Mrs. Street would begin asking Luther where I was and why I had not been to see them.

Mrs. Thelma Street was one of the kindest, sweetest ladies I have ever known. I never heard her gossip, or repeat stories of a negative nature about anyone. One day she explained her attitude to me. She said, “If I start to say anything about anyone else, I always stop and remind myself that God loves that person and He gave His son to die for him..” More of us should adopt her practice.

3:10 - FROM THE SAME MOUTH. *“...From the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.”* Aesop once wrote that the tongue was, equally, the best and worst of things. In his fables a man is able to blow both hot and cold breaths at the same time. Psalm 62:4 develops a similar contrast: “...they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly” (KJV). This is blatant hypocrisy. Do you know anyone like that? Of course you do! But

if that is what you are thinking, you may miss something very important. This has an application for each of us.

There are certain things I do not like to admit about myself - I might see it in you, but never in myself. I might admit a problem with anger, but not such hypocrisy as this. But the sad fact is that we are all inconsistent and if we are spiritually in tune with the Holy Spirit He will reveal to us that we often speak of people, causes, and churches in a very positive way one day, only to come back and say something negative on another day. Worse yet, we may even say, "He has a lot of good qualities, but...." Or what about the lady who says, "I love her like a sister, but...."

3:11 - A FOUNTAIN. *"Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?"* This is absolutely impossible. Enough fresh water would eventually dilute the bitter, but "fountain" implies a continuous output of both fresh and bitter water. That does not happen in nature - only in human beings. What James portrays here is "man's inner being (his heart) as a fountain or spring that shoots out fresh water and bitter from the same opening. Both types of springs were common in Palestine and are sometimes found very close to each other, but fresh water and bitter water never come out of the same hole. Only Christ can change the bitter water of our words into fresh and sweet ones, just as God changed the water at Marah (Exod. 15:23).^{ci}

3:12 - A FIG TREE. *"Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh."* Experiments with grafts notwithstanding, trees in their native state do not produce alien fruit. How then do we who have been saved and sanctified use our tongue to dishonor an honorable and glorious God?

NOR CAN SALT WATER PRODUCE FRESH. I once had a seminary professor who frequently the statement, "It goes without saying, but...." From time to time a student would quote that teacher and the typical response was, "And it could have gone without saying!" Large sums are spent today in an effort to try to produce clear, clean, fresh water from salt water or polluted water. I have used a point of use filter for many years to remove chlorine from my drinking water and the water my wife uses for cooking, making tea or coffee. The chlorine kills the bacteria and then we remove the chlorine before we drink it.

When I was growing up in the Mississippi Delta most farms got their water from shallow wells by means of either a manual or an electric pumps. Before my father installed an electric pump, I pumped water for household use, for livestock, and for washing. I would pump a fifty-five gallon barrel full of water and then put some lye in it and let it set all day in the sun. At the end of the day we would have warm soft water for washing clothes. We had to be careful not to stir up all the elements that the lye caused to settle on the bottom. The water did not purify itself, and it did not soften itself. It is a lot easier to pollute fresh water than it is to clean up polluted water. What a relief it was when a number of the area farmers began drilling artesian wells. The water from these wells had been filtered through rock layers for decades and it was the best water in the area.

II. PURE RELIGION AND THE TRUE WISE MAN, 3: 13-18.

A. True Wisdom Is Expressed By Works, Not Words Alone, 3:13.

This section contrasts heavenly and earthly wisdom (*sophia*). “The wisdom of which James speaks is practical and relational, not philosophical or speculative. It is evidenced by godly attitudes and actions (vv. 13, 17, 18). James 4:1-5:20 further contrasts and develops, by way of illustration, the truths of this paragraph.”^{cii}

3:13 - WHO AMONG YOU IS WISE? “*Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.*” The question with which the author opens this section (13-18) is also the theme of the section. But what is the answer to the question? The truly wise person is the person who faces up to his moral responsibilities. James contrasted traits of earthly and heavenly wisdom.. Through dedication to God one can live a good, humble life - this is the picture of wisdom. “Wisdom is God’s will in action, not human knowledge in competition.”^{ciii}

This is spoken with reference to the work of public teaching; and the meaning of the apostle is, that if there were such persons among them, they should be selected for that office. The characteristics here stated as necessary qualifications, are wisdom and knowledge. Those, it would seem, on which reliance had been placed, were chiefly those which were connected with a ready elocution, or the mere faculty of speaking.^{civ}

James points out the dangers which would follow if reliance were placed on eloquence, voice, and logic alone. The main qualifications for the teachers are wisdom and knowledge, not just eloquence and articulation.

LET HIM SHOW BY HIS GOOD BEHAVIOR. If any one has wisdom, “let him show it by his good life” (NIV). Wisdom is expressed in action, not just words. “As with faith (2:18), good deeds demonstrate wisdom, not merely good words.”^{cv} There is an old saying, “I had rather see a sermon than hear one any time.” I once read a quotation, “What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say.”

B. False Wisdom Is Characterized By Jealousy and Strife, 3:14.

3:14 - IF YOU HAVE BITTER JEALOUSY. “*But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.*” Question: Is there a jealousy that is not bitter? Certainly, all jealousy has the potential to become bitter, but we should make the distinction between “bitter jealousy” which destroys and the righteous zeal which defends. “The Greek indicative mood suggests that this was the case with them. The phrase might equally read “bitter jealousy,” as it once did, in order to differentiate between the proper jealous concern God had for his people and the selfish jealousy of humans.”^{cvi}

Today, the word jealousy is too often limited in our thinking to romantic interests. Jealousy in romantic relationships is destructive and should receive attention. Failure to come to terms with jealousy in marriage may easily lead to failure of the marriage. A man may be so jealous of his wife that he explodes when she speaks to, or smiles at another man. He may also be jealous of the time she spends with her parents - or even her children. This is destructive, but this is not the primary concern here. Adam Clarke's salient comments, though dated, are worth our consideration:

If ye be under the influence of an unkind, fierce, and contemptuous spirit, even while attempting or pretending to defend true religion, do not boast either of your exertions or success in silencing an adversary; ye have no religion, and no true wisdom, and to profess either is to lie against the truth. Let all writers on what is called polemic (fighting, warring) divinity lay this to heart.^{cvi}

SELFISH AMBITION. The Greek word denotes a "factious rivalry" (*erithian*, from *eritheuoō*, "to spin wool," thus working for personal gain). Is it not fortunate for us that "bitter jealousy" and "selfish ambition" were stamped out in the First Century so that we do not have to concern ourselves with such things today? Why have so many churches split in the last century? Why have so many small independent churches sprung up during the last two or three decades? In some cases, "selfish ambition" led to envy, strife, jealousy, schism. The name chosen by some of the new churches might indicate the desire to escape bitter jealousy and selfish ambition - Harmony, Unity, New Friendship, Fellowship.

DO NOT BE ARROGANT. Oh, how I hate arrogance! And it is no more attractive when it is mine. James has in mind the kind of selfish ambition that results in rivalry. Like bitterness and jealousy, arrogance finds its origin within, but soon finds an outlet. It soon breaks out in words and actions (see 3:11). Those who arrogantly boast of their wisdom and knowledge disqualify themselves by their boasting. No one is more unfit to teach others than one who has not learned this basic lesson. Jealousy, strife, and arrogance will only create problems as others react to it.

LIE AGAINST THE TRUTH. All lies are against the truth, and all are guilty at one time or another. To speak as though you are both wise and righteous when in fact you are not is to lie against the truth, and to do so habitually is to prove your disqualification as a teacher. Paul deals with such bragging by certain Jewish Christians in Romans 2:17, 23.

C. False Wisdom Is Not of God, 3:15-16.

3:15 - WISDOM...NOT FROM ABOVE. "*This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.*" The kind of wisdom that is characterized by "bitter jealousy", "selfish ambition", and arrogance (vs. 14) is "earthly, natural, and demonic." By "earthly" he means that it is worldly, of this world and not of the spirit - it is not of God. By "natural" he means basically the same thing - it is worldly, of the old nature and not a characteristic of one's new nature in Christ. In opposition to the true wisdom and illumination that comes from

above (1:17), this wisdom is “rooted and bound in the very nature of the earth itself—it is earthly.”^{cviii}

NATURAL. By “natural” he means, pertaining to man’s soul, the soulish part of man, as opposed to the body or the spirit. The same Greek word is used to describe men who do not have the Spirit living in them (Jude 19) - thence, a lost person.

DEMONIC. This wisdom does not descend from above, it ascends from below. It has its origin in hell! It is demonic. True believers cannot be possessed by demons but by persisting in walking in the flesh they can produce attitudes and actions that are demonic. They are under the influence of demons, even if not possessed by them. It is a very disturbing thing to look into the eyes of one who professes to be a child of God and see there that which seems demonic. How do you know that it is demonic? Some seem to find it very simple - “if they disagree with me they must be possessed!” I have looked a few - I thank God, only a few - church members in the eye when I had the distinct impression that I was looking at something demonic. The interesting thing was that I did not mention it to others, but in a number of cases others came to me and told me that what they were seeing and hearing was demonic.

A human being is never more demonic than when he assumes an air of infallibility. Such a person can tolerate no opposition, no question. An aging denominational worker once talked with me about a member of the church I served as pastor. He had known the deacon for many years and had worked with him in the past. He said, “He is just like a rattlesnake. If you don’t ever cross him you won’t have any trouble with him, but if you ever cross him, he will strike.” Believe me, he knew his man!

“Who among you is wise” (vs. 13) clearly implies that a lot of so-called intellectuals lack true wisdom. One can be street-wise, clever and cunning, but not be a truly wise person. The word for “wise” here denotes a mental grasp and discernment gained by experience. He is wise indeed who has a mental grasp and understanding of Christ through personal experience. This kind of wisdom cannot be found apart from God. That is the reason a lost man can never really understand the genuine Christian life. It also explains the Christian who is walking in the flesh rather than the spirit. He has within his heart the same Holy Spirit, Who produces humility, love, joy, and peace in others, but he knows no peace and he lacks the wisdom to understand what is missing because he is suppressing the Holy Spirit, Who alone can produce within him the fruit of the Spirit.

3:16 - WHERE THERE IS JEALOUSY. *“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.”* Jealousy and selfish ambition produce disunity in the church. The jealous person must be first in everything and cannot stand to see anyone else in the limelight instead of himself. “He vents this vicious disposition on anyone who happens to get ahead of him in anything. But he is really attacking God who made each of us different.”^{cix} Wiersbe summarizes this section for us:

When we have bitterness and envy in our hearts, our tongues will express these things. It matters not how spiritual our teaching might be: if the tongue is not controlled by the Spirit from a loving heart, then we are imparting false wisdom. To

their shame, Christians often believe this false wisdom and even glory in it! They know this “wisdom” contradicts the Bible, so they lie even against the truth of God’s Word! False wisdom belongs to the world (earthly), the flesh (sensual), and the devil (devilish)—the three great enemies of the believer (Eph. 2:1-3). You can always tell when a church or a family follows false wisdom: you will find jealousy, division, and confusion. Instead of humbly depending on the Spirit and the Word, they look to the world for ideas and to the flesh for strength, and by so doing play right into the hands of the devil.^{cx}

D. The Character of Wisdom From Above, 3:17-18.

3:17 - WISDOM FROM ABOVE...IS FIRST PURE. *“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.”* The wisdom that is from above is characterized as:

1. **Pure** - Wisdom from above makes us chaste, holy, and clean. The first effect of the wisdom that is from above is to make one pure. The word here used (Qāīḥ) is that which would be applied to one who is innocent, or flee from crime or blame. Compare Phil 4:8; 1 Tim. 5:22; 1 John 3:3; where the word is rendered, as here, “pure”; 2 Cor. 7:11; where it is rendered clear, (in this matter); 2 Cor. 11:2; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:2, where it is rendered chaste.

The meaning here is, that the first and immediate effect of religion is not on the intellect, to make it more enlightened; or on the imagination, to make it more discursive and brilliant; or on the memory and judgment, to make them clearer and stronger; but it is to purify the heart, to make the man upright, inoffensive, and good. This passage should not be applied, as it often is, to the doctrines of religion, as if it were the first duty of a church to keep itself free from errors in doctrine, and that this ought to be sought even in preference to the maintenance of peace—as if it meant that in doctrine a church should be “first pure, then peaceable;” but it should be applied to the individual consciences of men, as showing the effect of religion on the heart and life.^{cx}

2. **Peaceable** - This means living in peace with others and promoting peace among others - peacemakers. Unless one is pure in God’s eyes, he cannot be at peace with men.

3. **Gentle** - Modest, considerate, forbearing. A gentle person does not make demands of others. He is humble and gentle in dealing with others. But this does not mean that he is naive or gullible, nor does it mean that he is spineless. A gentle person can be courageous, a true defender of the faith. He does it in a gentle manner.

4. **Reasonable** - God’s wisdom is not stubborn or obstinate, but compliant, open to reason, not “hard to get along with.” With a reasonable person you can find some common ground, and even if you disagree on important issues you can agree to disagree agreeable.

5. **Full of mercy** - Merciful, ready to show compassion, always ready to forgive a transgression, sensitive to other people's needs. So important is this trait that it is included in the Beatitudes - "Blessed are the merciful."

6. **Good fruit** - fruitfulness. The wisdom of the world results in "every evil work" (3:16), but God's wisdom produces good deeds.

7. **Unwavering** - Impartial in love and service. The Greek word James uses here is the opposite expression of the word he uses to describe the man who sometimes believes God and sometimes does not (1:6). This person is who and what he says he is. Our closest neighbor and good friend when I was growing up was Garfield Ellis, a black man who called himself "colored." I enjoyed sitting and talking with this neighbor - and what a neighbor he was. I once asked him about some one and he replied, "I call them sometimes people. Sometimes they are this way and sometimes they are that way." I have know a lot of people like that. I am always amazed at the person who is friendly and shows concern when they need something or want to know something. You are convinced that you are cultivating a friendship that will be meaningful to both of you, but you are surprised the next time you see that person and he or she make it abundantly clear that they are not interested.

8. **Without hypocrisy** - The wisdom of God makes us genuine believers and not fakes. The word hypocrisy denotes play-acting. True wisdom eliminates play-acting, pretending to be a faithful child of God when one is not.

3:18 - THE SEED. *"And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."* In 3:16, James summarizes the results of the worldly wisdom that has been described in 3:15. Now, in 3:18, he summarizes the consequences of living according to the wisdom of God which he describes in 3:17. The fruits of the wisdom of the world are reaped immediately, but "a seed whose fruit is righteousness" will ripen over a period of time..

BY THOSE WHO MAKE PEACE. "Peacemakers" as in the Beatitudes. In keeping with the husbandry metaphor, a peacemaker is one who cultivates peace. "Calvin suggests that real peacemaking may sometimes involve exposing other people's sins rather than mildly covering them up. However, this ought to be done gently, as a doctor diagnoses a disease, not coldly as the court would condemn a criminal."^{cxii} To summarize this section (3:13-18), we see that:

1. True wisdom is from above.
2. It is characterized by the virtues listed in notes under vs. 17.
3. It helps the believer grow in righteousness, which brings peace.

CHAPTER IV

I. WORLDLINESS, 4:1-17.

A. The Source, Nature, and Results of Strife, 4:1-3.

1. The source of man's strife is his own lusts, 4:1.

The chapter division falls in the middle of the third section of the book (3:13-4:10). "This section deals with the two different kinds of wisdom and is typified by two ways of life, that is, two kinds of friendship: the one with the world and the other with God."^{cxiii}

4:1 - THE SOURCE OF QUARRELS. "*What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?*" This was not written in a vacuum. Clarke provides us with some background information:

About the time in which St. James wrote, whether we follow the earlier or the later date of this epistle, we find, according to the accounts given by Josephus, Bell. Jud. lib. ii. c. 17, etc., that the Jews, under pretense of defending their religion, and procuring that liberty to which they believed themselves entitled, made various insurrections in Judea against the Romans, which occasioned much bloodshed and misery to their nation. The factions also, into which the Jews were split, had violent contentions among themselves, in which they massacred and plundered each other. In the provinces, likewise, the Jews became very turbulent; particularly in Alexandria, and different other parts of Egypt, of Syria, and other places, where they made war against the heathens, killing many, and being massacred in their turn. They were led to these outrages by the opinion that they were bound by their law to extirpate idolatry, and to kill all those who would not become proselytes to Judaism. These are probably the wars and fightings to which St. James alludes; and which they undertook rather from a principle of covetousness than from any sincere desire to convert the heathen.^{cxiv}

From what we read in this chapter it is clear that there were carnal divisions and disputes among these Jewish believers in James' day. One cause was the selfish, even arrogant desire of many to be teachers (3:1), but a more basic cause was disobedience. "There was a lack of true separation in the lives of the people. It is tragic when brethren dwell together in discord instead of unity (Ps. 133). 'Can two walk together except they be agreed?' (Amos 3:3)."^{cxv} In this chapter, James is not talking about the internal conflicts of the heart (over which Paul was so grieved), though it may apply, but to actual conflicts with others. The pursuit of selfish desires can lead to conflicts between individuals, as well as wars between nations.

YOUR PLEASURES. Or, your lusts. This was the source of the Jewish contentions that led to the growth of various sects in James' day. Wars between nations often begin when one king covets territory controlled by another. Contentions within the church have often sprung from the lust of one leader for the position of another, for popularity, influence, or power.

For several months, I have followed reports of controversy, contention, wrangling, and haggling over various forms of worship in one general area near a large southern city. The following is a sort of montage of several churches, presented here as one. The history goes something like this: a pastor resigns and the church elects a new Pastor Search Committee which distributes a questionnaire to determine what the church wants in a new pastor. They study the results and find that fifty-five percent of the people want a thirty-two year old man with an earned doctorate and twenty years experience as senior pastor - he can reach young people. He will have a wife (who has taught in elementary school) and from 1.5 to 2.5 children. He will have an exciting plan for revitalizing the church.

The church calls Doctor I. Ben Excited as pastor and he immediately brings in a new Minister of Music, Bro. Gung Ho, who begins to replace older choir members with younger ones. He explains that they can stay but if they do they are going to become “dancing Baptists.” He sells the organ and buys new instruments. The “song service” sounds more like a rock concert than a “traditional” worship service. Hymnals are out, overhead projections are in. Hand waving, swaying, even dancing are in, “be still and know that I am God” is out. Pastoral authority moves toward authoritarianism. The pentecostalization of a Baptist church is under way.

How do they get away with this? They bring in Bro. High Octane to preach a youth revival and he spends the week mesmerizing young people of the Pepsi and pizza persuasion and lead them in mocking their elders - people the age of their parents - but mostly they are not their parents because many have never been to the church before. Evangelist, Bro. High Octane, entertains them one minute, and the next minute he tells these young people that those who do not want to do what they want to them to do are lost. They laugh and cry, laugh and cry - and they then follow Pastor Ben to business meetings and out vote the members who teach the classes and pay the bills.

Older staff members are forced out and before long the only ones left are marching in lock-step with I. Ben Excited and Gung Ho. When there is opposition, they begin to implement their plan to deal with dissenters. First, divide and conquer. Isolate members and pressure dissenters to resign elected positions, or leave the church. If some do not go they may call employers and ask them to put pressure on an employee - after all, we buy all our cleaning supplies from your store, or we give generously to your organization.

I stated at the beginning of the illustration that this is a montage - running several churches together as one. I did not say that it is fiction! I am not making this up and this is not a one time occurrence. Jobs and reputations mean nothing to I Ben Excited, and nothing seems too low for him if it serves his purpose. He finds his justification in the annual report to the convention, an article in the state Baptist paper, or recognition from the department of evangelism?

Then the staff looks at the financial statement and discover that the people who have been forced out of the church are the tithers and teachers. Adjustments have to be made, and the first thing to go will be missions - cut the Cooperative Program - and maybe special funds like the building fund.

Contentions, wrangling, haggling, and what is behind it all? The same thing that was behind it is James' day - someone's lust for power, recognition, or publicity.

2. The consequences of strife, 4:2-3.

4:2 - YOU LUST AND DO NOT HAVE. *“You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.”* The word “lusts” does not necessarily mean sensual passions. It simply means desires.

These desires are at work in the members of the body, and they excite the flesh and create problems. Please keep in mind that the body itself is not sinful; it is the fallen nature that would control the body that is sinful. The flesh is human nature apart from God, just as the world is human society apart from God. This is why Rom. 6 exhorts us to yield the members of our bodies to the Spirit: see also the emphasis in Rom. 8 and Gal. 5. Note also what James says in 1:5 about our desires. The pleasure dominated life leads men to shameful deeds, sets men against each other, and shuts off prayer. Here “lust” points to more than a desire for pleasure. It is a craving, an obsession with something that is always out of reach.^{cxvi}

MURDER. Lust does not always lead to murder, but it has that potential, as Jesus clearly warns.

You have heard that the ancients were told, “YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER” and “Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.” But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, “You good-for-nothing,” shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, “You fool,” shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell (Matt. 5:21-22).

The Jews had engaged in riots and insurrections, but had not gained what they sought, nor would they gain it until 1946 (return of Jews to Palestine) or 1963 (the Seven Day War). “James probably did not have actual murder in mind; but by Christ's standards, the envy and hate that such desires spawn are just as bad (cf. Matt. 5:21, 22). David and Ahab are examples of men who wanted something so desperately that they actually did kill to get it. Wrong desires lead to wrong attitudes that often end up in wrong actions.”^{cxvii} Wiersbe writes:

In v. 2 James describes these believers' sinful actions: they desire, they kill to obtain (see Gal. 5:15), and they do not stop to pray about their desires. And, when they do pray, they pray selfishly that they might enlarge their pleasures, not glorify God. The flesh can even encourage a person to pray! Of course, when a believer is at war with himself, it is not likely that he can have peace with others.^{cxviii}

YOU FIGHT AND QUARREL. The source of the conflict here was their envy: “You are envious and cannot obtain.” James does not tell us exactly what he has in mind here, but obviously

the readers would understand if he pointed to them. Think of the so-called holy wars, the Crusades, the Protestant/ Catholic strife in Ireland. Think of the conflicts in the Middle East. The intense hatred between the Jews and Samaritans in Jesus' day was religious, not racial as some claim.

YOU DO NOT HAVE. God responds faith, not friction; love, not lust; prayer, not pride. "People who grab for everything they can get and then hold grudges when they don't get what they want are hardly the type of people God listens to. If they did start asking God instead of fighting for everything, they would soon stop fighting."^{cxix} This verse then answers the questions posed in 4:1: "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?" This explanation is best taken with what follows. "James did not contend that the reason lust was not gratified was because people failed to ask God to fill those desires. He simply revealed the clear source of conflict deep in covetous human hearts."^{cxx}

4:3 - YOU ASK AND DO NOT RECEIVE. *"You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures."* This verse must be considered in any study of prayer. There are many "religious" people who pray fervently, but they ask for the wrong motives - for selfish purposes. The correct way for Christians to have their legitimate needs met is by asking God. One should not expect to receive what he asks for if he asks "with wrong motives (evilly, amiss). The verb "ask" is in the middle voice, meaning to "ask for yourself." If there is any doubt the purpose clause that follows clears it up: "that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." "Spend" might better be translated "squander." "Pleasures" is from the Greek word for hedonism (as in vs. 1). What he is saying is that God will never provide for "hedonistic squandering"!

Is it possible that Christians today sometimes pray for wealth ("Lord, please bless my business) for no higher reason.

Our Lord wants us to look to Him for all our needs. Psalm 23 assures us that our Shepherd will supply all our wants (need). The Good Shepherd urges us: "Ask, and it will be given to 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" (Matt. 7:7-8). The Lord is waiting to hear from His children: "It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear" (Is. 65:24).

There is a king sized "however" here - if you expect to receive anything from the Lord you must humble yourself before Him, and your motives must be pure and unselfish. While our God will supply our needs, he is not going to provide for hedonistic squandering. He may elect to bless some of His servants with great wealth, and then lead them to provide jobs for many other people. He may watch as some of His children live "from hand to mouth," and never lift them up to a higher rung on the socioeconomic ladder so that they can live the lifestyle of the rich and famous. He promises to be with us always and to provide for us, but He will not listen to insincere, or selfish prayers.

QUESTION: What are the proper motives in prayer? Why do you pray? Is it to get what you can out of God, or to so submit yourself to Him that He will get what He wants out of you?

B. Worldliness Condemned By God, 4:4-6.

Certain points are made in these verses, not the least of which are the following:

1. Man must choose between God and the world.
2. The friend of the world cannot be the friend of God.
3. There is glory in humility, but anguish in pride.

4:4 - ADULTERESSES. *“You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”* Instead of the customary, “My brethren,” James charges, “You adulterous people!” The Jews, because of their covenant relationship with God are considered to be wed to God in the Old Testament, just as the church is the bride of Christ in the New Testament. For that reason, idolatry is called spiritual harlotry. James here uses “adulterous” symbolically for unfaithful people, as often in the Old Testament.

FRIENDSHIP WITH THE WORLD. The Greek word is *philia*, indicating a reciprocal relationship. Unfaithful people love the world, and the world loves them. Think of it - the world is at enmity with God, yet many who profess a faith in God love the world and are loved by it! How do you explain that? It is called sin, rebellion - spiritual adultery.

A prime example of how the world feels about a committed Christians was seen in an editorial written by Dave Rossie (Monroe, LA News-Star, August 25, 2000), as George W. Bush and Al Gore were running for the presidency):

“As for Bush saying the only way to the Pearly Gates is through Jesus Christ, I suggest you listen carefully to that statement, as it is the whole truth, and one day every person whether Buddhist, Muslim, Jew or worshiper of other pagan gods will discover.”

That advice, brimming with Christian charity, came from a reader in upstate New York.

I won't name her because she did not ask to have her letter printed and I have no desire to expose her to any possibly unfriendly responses from misguided non-Christian souls who might take exception to being called pagans.

I think the woman's comments are noteworthy, however, because she is hardly alone in her conviction that hers and hers alone is the one true religion.

The conceit has led to more wars, pogroms and riots than any other single cause in recorded history.

From the Crusades to the continuing Arab-Israeli hostilities, true believers have been

happily slaughtering one another in the name of a god they know unequivocally to be on their side.

The woman's letter was in response to a column in which I noted that while George W. Bush had proclaimed last June 10 to be Jesus Day in Texas, he had not allowed himself to fall victim to ecumenicism and follow Jesus Day with a Mohammed Day, a Buddha Day, or an Abraham Day.

I had further noted that Dubyuh had opined sometime earlier that the kingdom of heaven was the exclusive playground of born-again Christians, and no other need apply.

Well, he may be right. Who knows? But if he is, I suspect it's a pretty dull place.^{cxxi}

Dave Rossie continued in his column to expose his anti-Christian bias, his ignorance of the Word of God, and his lostness. The woman was right. George Bush was right. All Rossie can say is "Who Knows?" Sadly, we not only see the ravings of a lost man who knows nothing of the Word of God, we see the postmodern hatred of public figures who pay more than lip service to Christ. They can take a little bit of "god," but they hate Christ. One columnist stated that Americans like their candidates religious, but not very religious.

The simple fact is that God is absolutely inclusive in His invitation to eternal life: "And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17. He is, however, very exclusive in admitting people into His heaven - "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

A FRIEND OF THE WORLD. With "*therefore*," James ties together the two parts of this verse, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? **Therefore** whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (emphasis added)." The world hates God, not the god idea, not pagan gods, not even a false Christ. It hates the Lord God of the Scripture, and it hates Jesus Christ just as much as the prince of this world (Satan) hates Him.

I was appalled by a Baptist Press release in October, 2000 which quoted a "specialist" in evangelism who in an address to an evangelism conference made the statement that it is easy to witness to New Agers. I immediately e-mailed a man who has specialized in New Age movements for the last twelve years, asking if he could believe such a naive statement. He had seen it and informed me that there were several Southern Baptist missionaries at the meeting who specialize in cults, the occult, and New Age movements. None of these men, some of the leading authorities in the world in New Age (postmodern) movements, were asked to comment. The specialist who was interviewed obviously had no understanding of New Age philosophy. Talking with New Agers and reaching them are two entirely different things.

It is often easier to talk with an out and out atheist, who says there is no God, than to try to

reason with someone who readily acknowledges that there is a god or a god-like force in the universe. The religious New Ager believes that if your god serves your purpose and my god serves my purpose we should both be happy. The worst possible thing you can do is to imply that your god is superior to his. He is monistic in his belief about god - all is one and one is all. You and I are one with the universe, just as we are one with each other.

Toward the end of the Twentieth Century, New Agers helped push atheistic evolutionary humanism back into the closet from which they had emerged and enjoyed a meteoric rise in popularity in America following its prior acceptance in England and Europe . It was energized by the Stokes “Monkey Trial” in 1925 and within a few short decades it was the gospel of the classroom. New Agers adopted the moral values of the Humanists, but they injected their philosophy with religion - they believe very strongly in a god, in gods, or in a god-like force. They reject, however, the God of the Bible, and they especially hate Jesus Christ.

The world’s hatred for Jesus Christ is manifested in many ways. It may be seen, not only in false religions, but also in the false worship of true religion. It is evident in materialism, ungodly entertainment, sinful habits, and in disobedience to God..

If you want to see a clear illustration of the world at work against God, look to the secular media in America. All those 1930s movies about journalists proclaimed, “Nothing but the facts,” but within a half a century, if the media did not like the facts, is paraded out the smoke and mirrors to deceive the American people. Sadly, senior adults who would never miss a newscast have been some of the easiest to deceive. How many times have senior adults been told that a particular candidate will take away their social security? Repeatedly, the major networks protected President Bill Clinton before, during, and after impeachment hearings. The media is liberal and will promote liberalism at every turn, but the bias against God is far greater than its bias against any political party or candidate.

William Proctor, in *The Gospel According to the New York Times* (Broadman/Holman, Nashville, 2000, pp. 308) demonstrates the bias of *The New York Times* against God by pointing to articles and their content. News about Christ or Christians is often omitted, slanted, or refuted. To illustrate, Proctor points to the subject of creation: “A near-hysterical subhead suggested that even discussing the subject of a God-caused creation would be enough to endanger the future of Western civilization: ‘OUR TOLERANCE OF FALLACIES LIKE CREATIONISM IMPERILS SOCIETY.’”^{cxxii} In everything from abortion to athletes who give God credit for their success, the *Times* shows a systematic bias against everything that is Christian. *The New York Times* is quoted daily by other papers, and by radio and television. Around the country every day, papers and people in the electronic media quote the *Times* as the Christian quotes the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel according to the media is often in conflict with the Gospel of Christ.

4:5 - THE SCRIPTURE. “*Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: ‘He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us’?*” I love Francis Shaeffer. I started reading his work a number of years before his death and he remains one of my favorites. Sometime around 1960 Shaeffer wrote that the Scripture would be the next great battlefield of Christianity.

Anyone who is not aware of the fulfillment of that prediction has been living in a theological vacuum.

Whole denominations have been deeply divided over the issue of inerrancy of Scripture and some denominations are still embroiled in the struggle..

Let me state my position as clearly as possible. Based on internal claims (claims made in the Bible), external proofs, and my own experience with Scripture, I subscribe to the position of inerrancy. This is not a political position, but a theological conviction. Reason supports this position as far as I am concerned. If God could not have produced a perfect Book, why call Him God? If He could have produced a perfect Book but would not do it, what kind of God is He? I recall a statement I read that has some application at this point - I am sure it was in one of Shaeffer's books but I have not gone back through all of them to find it and document it. The statement was, "The most meaningless word in the English language is the word god, spelled with a small "g". I spell my God's name with a capital "G", therefore, I have no problem with Inerrancy of His Word. If we had a copy of the original manuscripts I am sure they would be without error.

Here James' quotation of the Old Testament shows that he regarded the Old Testament as God's authoritative Word. "He cited it to support the authority of his own inspired word. He did not quote any text word for word. Rather, he stated the meaning of several Old Testament texts much as disciples do today in conversation. He may have interrupted his thought before citing the Greek translation of Pr 3:34 in v 6."^{cxxiii} To paraphrase it, James is asking, "Do you imagine there is no meaning to the Scripture that says, 'The Spirit that dwells in us longs jealously over us'?"

As I view my own denomination, I am distressed that which traditionally defined us today divides us. Jerry Sutton is the author of a recent book, *The Baptist Reformation* (Broadman and Holman, 2000), which chronicles the struggle among Southern Baptists over the Bible: "The one issue around which the controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention revolved was the issue of biblical authority and particularly the nature of biblical inspiration."^{cxxiv} Walter Shurden and others have written historical accounts from the liberal and the moderate positions, but Sutton's is the first from the more conservative position. Whatever position we read, and whatever position we take, there is no denying that the Scripture is a central issue. There is too much proof to deny it.

When Sutton quotes some of the professors in our six seminaries, I recall many of the people and issues involved in the struggle. He states that the impact of the controversy was much less severe at New Orleans Seminary.^{cxxv} However, it was not left untouched. I was there and knew a few professors who held a rather moderate/liberal view of Scripture. There were teachers there who did not believe in the existence of Satan, and some who held the unitary view of God. One professor believed one could lose his salvation. There were some outstanding professors there at the time, and the Lord is blessing our six Southern Baptist seminaries (now seven with one in Canada), as well as three other theological institutions which primarily serve Southern Baptists: Luther Rice, Mid-America, and Criswell Center for Biblical Studies. There are others serving the Lord in America which hold a traditional Southern Baptist position. Emmanuel College for Christian Studies and Cambridge Graduate School offer accredited degrees via the Internet (I am happy to be a faculty member). Tommy French, in his President's Address (*Changing Lives in Changing Times*) to the

Louisiana Baptist Convention, Monday, November 13, 2000, in Alexandria, announced that one in ever four seminary students in America is enrolled in one of the six Southern Baptist seminaries.^{cxxvi} When you add the other seminaries and graduate schools to the mix, the number is even more amazing.

The vast majority of Southern Baptists have traditionally stood to the right of center in the position they take on Scripture, and thence on other doctrinal issues. I prayerfully seek to understand why so many of us are so divided. Without a doubt, there are political issues which polarize some of us. I find it interesting, for example, that many who identify themselves as “moderates” state very candidly that they are conservative. Let me state as emphatically as possible that I am not a moderate, and I reject the designation moderate/conservative or fundamentalist/conservative - terms which those who lean to the left seem to enjoy more than those on the right, possibly because it gives some an opportunity to call those on the opposite side of the aisle “fundamentalists.”

I am not a fundamentalist and do not appreciate being called one. Those on the left do not want to wear the “liberal” label. It would seem to me that we have extremists on both the right and the left, and if we all agreed on that we would see a much greater number of Southern Baptists who would be to the right of center and a much smaller number who would identify themselves as either liberal, moderate, or fundamentalist. One thing seems obvious to me: if you see no one to your left, you are on the left; and if you see no one to your right, you are on the right. We need to be honest and seek more meaningful and productive dialogue. It is possible that we would find a solution if those on the left were reassured that the right would not try to push them to the extreme right. It is also possible that those on the right need to be assured that those who lean to the left are not seeking to lead the denomination too far to the left.

Certain other things are essential. First, both sides need to be fair and just and apply the Golden Rule in every area of denominational life, from election of leaders and committees to reports and business sessions. Second, we need to take a break from the struggle over the Bible and go back and study it to find the Lord’s position. We have wrangled and haggled over the “Word of God” to the point that we may be overlooking the “God of the Word.” Third, we need to apply the Spurgeon principle. Spurgeon was once asked how he would defend the Bible. He responded, “Defend the Bible?!! Sir, how do you defend a tiger? You don’t defend a tiger, you turn it loose!” The great needs of the world today demand that we stop arguing over the Bible and turn it loose.

HE JEALOUSLY DESIRES THE SPIRIT. *“He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us.”* What does this mean? I was relieved when I went to the commentaries and discovered that many serious students of the word have asked that same question. Clarke writes, “This verse is exceedingly obscure.”^{cxxvii} Barnes agrees: “Few passages of the New Testament have given expositors more perplexity than this. The difficulty has arisen from the fact that no such passage as that which seems here to be quoted is found in the Old Testament; and to meet this difficulty, expositors have resorted to various conjectures and solutions.”^{cxxviii} Kurt A. Richardson in *The New American Commentary* (Broadman/Holman, Nashville, 1977, pp. 217) acknowledges that this verse is “notoriously difficult to translate”, although there are clues through the epistle that

will help. Commentators have used various “solutions” to explain the many ways the verse can be translated and punctuated. Richardson recommends that we follow the simplest and most natural reading.

As in the previous verse, James presented his hearers with a rhetorical question to penetrate into what they were thinking - misguided as it was! But of course their thinking was misguided because they had allowed their desires for God and their desires for the idols of this world to wrap them up in a total conflict of desire and interpersonal relations. Instead of appreciating the power of the tongue and God’s requirement to bridle it, they had allowed their tongues to spew forth both blessing and cursing (3:10). Instead of pursuing the wisdom from above that counsels humility and peace, they had allowed the wisdom from below to dominate their aspirations (vv. 15-17). This dichotomous movement of the will back and forth between different worlds of desire and deed was what James had in mind.”^{cxxix}

The New Commentary on the Whole Bible and the Bible Knowledge Commentary seek to explain the problems faced here. First, the NCWB:

The second part of this verse is very difficult to translate. But before looking at the translation, it must be pointed out that the earliest manuscript evidence supports the reading, “the spirit he caused to live in us tends towards envy” (NIV). In the margin of the NIV there are two alternative readings: “God jealously longs for the spirit that he made to live in us” and “the Spirit he caused to live in us longs jealously.” **There has been considerable discussion as to whether the spirit here is actually the Holy Spirit or simply man’s natural human spirit.** The word for “spirit” in Greek has an article, which usually means “the divine Spirit,” but not always. However, **the real confusion seems to center around the meaning of “jealousy.” If this is an impure jealousy, then James must be speaking of man’s natural spirit, since the Holy Spirit is incapable of such a wrong feeling.** If, on the other hand, it is the positive kind of jealousy that a husband might have for the faithful love of his wife, then, as 4:4 suggests, God’s Holy Spirit is quite capable of such love. **Another problem with interpreting this verse is that no one knows what OT Scripture(s) James was alluding to.** At best, we can say that the thought of James 4:5 approximates the thought of Exodus 20:5 and 34:14 (emphasis added).^{cxxx}

The Bible Knowledge Commentary deals with the same questions about this very difficult passage (I add the emphasis, except in the NIV translation at the end):

This is one of the most difficult verses to translate in the entire letter. A very literal translation would be, “Or think you that vainly the Scripture says to envy yearns the spirit which was made to dwell in you, but He gives great grace.” **Is the “spirit” the Holy Spirit or the human spirit?** Is the spirit to be taken as the subject of the verb “yearns” or as its object? **Is “envy” to be seen as “unrighteous desire” or as “righteous jealousy”?** Numerous translations are possible: (a) “The Spirit who

indwells you jealously yearns [for you] and He gives more grace.” (b) “He [God] yearns jealously for the Holy Spirit which indwells you and He gives more grace.” (c) “The [human] spirit which indwells you yearns to envy, but He [God] gives more grace.” The NIV favors the latter idea: **Or do you think... that the spirit He caused to live in us tends toward envy**, but “He gives us more grace?” (v. 6).^{cxxxix}

Since there is no clearly developed doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the epistle of James. He is dealing with very practical and down to earth principles of Christian behavior, so the verse is probably not concerned with God either desiring his Holy Spirit to indwell believers or what Paul called grieving the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30).^{cxxxix}

4:6 - A GREATER GRACE. *“But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, ‘GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.’* James is quoting Proverbs 3:34. In 4:4, he made the point that “whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” And pride is of the world. Jesus gave an excellent commentary on the relationship between God and the world (the world apart from God - in rebellion against Him). He simply said, “No man can serve two masters” (Matt. 6:24).

GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD. God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son to die on a cruel cross to provide for the redemption of those who humble themselves before Him, but God is emphatically opposed to (resists) the proud. In so doing, He is only responding in kind to those who have already set themselves against him. He is always opposed to pride, since that is what led Satan to rebel against Him in the first place. The man of pride is in rebellion against God. Pride is a brazen rejection of the Grace of God

GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. Whether a believer is called to resist his human spirit (vs. 5) which tends toward envy or to rejoice in the Holy Spirit Who jealously yearns for each believer’s edification, the call is to eschew pride and to submit humbly to the authority of God. The remedy for conflict is a spirit of humility which is rewarded by the unmerited favor of a loving God. James continues by showing in verses 7-12 how humility is related to peaceful justice.

Christians must be able to distinguish between that which is of the world and that which is of God - and draw a clear line between the two. This calls for definition, distinction, and discrimination. We are **in** the world, but we must not be **of** the world. How do we overcome the world? By the grace of God. To whom is the grace of God available? To the humble. Humility and pride, being diametrically opposed to each other, cannot operate in the same sphere.

Christians who live for the world and the flesh become proud, and the devil takes advantage of this situation, for pride is one of his chief tools. God wants to give us more grace—more than anything Satan can give! The Christian must use the Word to resist Satan (Luke 4:1-13), and this the Spirit will enable him to do. But God cannot help the Christian who is proud, who refuses to repent of sin and humble himself. Grace is for the lowly, not the lofty. We must first submit to God; then we can effectively resist the devil.^{cxxxix}

C. Repentance Is Demanded, 4:7-10.

God demands repentance of any Christian who thinks he can be a friend of the world. Repentance denotes a change of mind which is reflected in a change in behavior, it is not a feeling, even though there may be strong guilt feelings involved. Pop-psychology seeks to get rid of guilt feelings, Jesus Christ seeks to get rid of the guilt. Guilt feelings accompany the conviction of sin and there is no repentance until there is conviction, but we should never confuse conviction with repentance. If one “walks down the aisle” and makes a profession of faith because he is under conviction, he may be reassured that his sins are forgiven because he “prayed to receive Jesus.” But if he did not repent he is still lost, and we are not doing anyone any favor when we bring a lost person into the church. It is not good for the health of the church either.

This passage (4:7-10) contains 10 of the 54 imperatives in the book of James. In straightforward, hard hitting terms, James brilliantly describes the characteristics of genuine repentance. They are these:

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| (1) submission to God | (2) resisting the devil |
| (3) drawing near to God | (4) cleansing of hands |
| (5) purifying the heart | (6) lamentation |
| (7) mourning | (8) weeping |
| (9) turning | (10) humbling oneself before the Lord |

4:7 - SUBMIT THEREFORE TO GOD. “*Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*” Submit here is a military term, meaning to be in subjection to, or to render obedience to another. Obedience to God is man’s most sacred obligation. It is also essential to spiritual growth and spiritual warfare. There will be no victory over Satan, sin, death, or the world apart from submission to God. The warfare imagery in this passage is striking. James has already listed the weapons at our disposal: faith, humility, prayer, and God’s wisdom. Now he urges us to stand up to Satan and fight. In Ephesians 6:11-18, Paul lists the full armor of God, each piece of which is needed in spiritual warfare.

Victory of the devil does not come through human will, intelligence, energy or emotions. Who did not hear the story in elementary school of the little engine that could - you know, “I think I can, I think I can, I think I can” - and it just kept going over the hill. You do not win a victory over the devil by positive thinking - or positive imagining. The victory is God’s.

RESIST THE DEVIL AND HE WILL FLEE FROM YOU. Resist is another military term, meaning to take a stand. We must maintain the order set forth here - you must never try to resist the devil until you have submitted yourself to God. You have no power to resist the devil, no power to drive him away or to intimidate him except through Jesus Christ. Satan flees from no human being. He only flees from Jesus Christ. Here we have God’s personal assurance that Satan can be made to take flight.

When I was a young person an evangelist came to our church majored in hell-fire and brimstone. I don't mean he preached on hell and the devil, we should all do that. This man seemed determined to scare people into walking down the aisles. As we left after one of the services, someone mentioned the way the evangelist was preaching. My mother, always quick to befriend any servant of God, said, "At least if he scares the devil out of someone it is better than leaving the devil in him." My daddy, ever quiet but ever hard to misunderstand, replied, "You don't scare the devil, you only scare the man." Satan only fears God, and fear Him he does. Before you resist the devil be sure you have first drawn near to the Lord.

According to various accounts, General Nathan Bedford Forrest on more than one occasion caused a panicked flight when he charged Union forces. Once when he was pursuing federal forces he had ridden far ahead of his army. Imagine his surprise when he caught them! About two thousand strong, they had stopped in a wooded area and they were preparing to attack. But Forrest didn't know how many enemy soldiers there were and he did not know if the main body was waiting for his troops or if this was simply a rear guard.

Looking off to his right he spotted an officer with about fifty men. He road over and asked the major where the enemy was. The major pointed to the edge of the woods across a field, "They are right there and they are preparing to charge. What do we do?" Nathan Bedford Forrest, without any hesitation, said, "We charge!" Immediately, he jerked his horse around and standing in the stirrups with sword over his head, he charged across the field toward the enemy, his little troop in tow. The Yankees turned and ran. Forrest, who had something like twenty-six (or was it twenty-nine?) horses shot out from under him during the war, was called by a British military historian the single greatest soldier in the war. Once when he charged through enemy lines he looked back and saw that he had charged all the way through the lines and was in fact behind them - alone. He turned and charged back through the Union line. When he came under fire he charged by a young Yankee soldier, reached down and grabbed him and pulled him up behind him and held him until he was out of range and then dropped him. No one fired for fear of hitting their own man.

Once after the Civil War, Forrest was forced to kill a black man who worked for him in order to protect the man's wife. Area blacks, not knowing why he had killed the man, marched to his house to have their revenge. Even though what he faced that day was a mob scene, Nathan Bedford Forrest walked out onto his porch, raised his hand and demanded, "Halt!" They halted and when they knew the circumstances they left him unharmed.

The name, Nathan Bedford Forrest, caused enemy soldiers to tremble in fear. The presence Forest was enough to stop a mob. Why? He had proved himself a dangerous adversary and opponent. The name of Jesus Christ cause fear in the hearts and minds of all the demons. A lot of wayward human beings may not fear Jesus, but no demon is so stupid! They have seen Him in action. Satan, who tried to tempt the human Jesus, trembles at the thought of an encounter of he risen Christ. He will flee from Christ in the hearts of believers.

We are engaged in spiritual warfare and our adversary is a master of both bloody warfare

with its carnage and cold war with its propaganda, lies, and deception. Satan is the father of lies, a liar from the beginning. He is a master at deception and ever on the prowl, seeking whom he may devour. He comes to us in many forms, and in various ways. Satellite television networks hawk all sorts of occult practices, fortune telling, tarot cards, astrology, and other demonic practices. The church of Satan is open in its fight against Jesus Christ, witchcraft is flourishing in America, and New Age occult influences are seen everywhere. Halloween, if it continues to grow in popularity, has the potential of becoming a bigger holiday than Christmas in America. Let us face it, Satan gets a lot more mileage out of Halloween than God does. Add the various games now available to children and young people and you see that Satan is trying to reach children and an early age.

AN EXERCISE: List some modern occult games which, if played by children, will open their hearts and minds to the influence of Satan. What do you know about

1. Dungeons and Dragons
2. Harry Potter
3. Pokemon
4. Others

Christians must study the occult in order to be equipped for spiritual warfare, but **let me warn you** of one thing. You should **focus your study of Satan in the Bible, praying** that God will fill us with **the Holy Spirit** so that we will be protected. To study occult material may open your life to satanic influences - it has happened to long-time students of the Word, including ministers of the Gospel. It is only in the Word of God, earnest prayer, and in the power of the Holy Spirit that you can win a victory over Satan.

4:8 - DRAW NEAR TO GOD. *“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”* The Christian is assured that any time he draws near to God, the Lord will meet him more than half way. But there is a catch: we cannot draw near to God! He must draw us to Himself, and it is in submission to Him that He will draw us to Himself.

Approach HIM, in the name of Jesus, by faith and prayer, and he will draw nigh to you—he will meet you at your coming. When a soul sets out to seek God, God sets out to meet that soul; so that while we are drawing near to him, he is drawing near to us. The delicacy and beauty of these expressions are, I think, but seldom noted.^{cxxxiv}

To know that God is approachable is a blessing in itself. It also reveals a lot about the nature of our Redeemer. Paul wrote to the Roman saints: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:1-2, NKJV). This denotes permanent, eternal access to God through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

CLEANSER YOUR HANDS, YOU SINNERS. Clarke has written, “This I think to be the beginning of a new address, and to different persons; and should have formed the commencement of a new verse. Let your whole conduct be changed; cease to do evil learn to do well. Washing or cleansing the hands was a token of innocence and purity.”^{cxxxv}

Both “cleanse” and “purify” are verbs that refer to ceremonial cleansing, a figure that would not be wasted on these Jewish converts. These verbs spoke volumes to them. The need for this cleansing is clearly seen in the way James addressed his readers, “you sinners” and “you double-minded” Barnes offers some background insight:

There may possibly be an allusion here to Isa. 1:15-16: “Your hands are full of blood; wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil.” The heart is the seat of motives and intentions—that by which we devise anything; the hands, the instruments by which we execute our purposes. The hands here are represented as defiled by blood, or by acts of iniquity. To wash or cleanse the hands was, therefore, emblematic of putting away transgression, Matt. 27:24. Compare Deut. 21:6; Ps. 26:6. The heathen and the Jews were accustomed to wash their hands before they engaged in public worship. The particular idea here is, that in order to obtain the favor of God, it is necessary to put away our sins; to approach him with a desire to be pure and holy. The mere washing of the hands, in itself, could not recommend us to his favor; but that of which the washing of the hands would be an emblem, would be acceptable in his sight. It may be inferred from what is said here that no one can hope for the favor of God who does not abandon his transgressions. The design of the apostle is, evidently, to state one of the conditions on which we can make an acceptable approach to God. It is indispensable that we come with a purpose and desire to wash ourselves from all iniquity, to put away from us all our transgressions. So David said, “I will wash my hands in innocency; so will I compass thine altar. O Lord,” Ps. 26:6.^{cxxxvi}

For us today this denotes moral cleanness in the Christian’s daily life. But how do we do that? We cannot cleanse ourselves, God must do it. In 1 John 1:9, we read, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

PURIFY YOUR HEARTS. This denotes inner cleanness. The believer must be both inwardly clean and outwardly clean - repentance must be full and complete. Jesus taught that only the pure in heart will see God (Matt. 5:8). The hands represent what a person is on the outside, the heart what he on the inside. It is in the heart that the “whole army of evil desires” (4:1, TLB) is at war, and it is here that the “evil pleasures of this world” (4:4, TLB) are first allowed to enter the heart. God wants

men whose attitudes as well as actions are clean and pure.

YOU DOUBLE-MINDED. See also, James 1:8. Without a doubt, James has in mind those who were vacillating in their commitment to God. Their hearts and minds were not firmly fixed on God. They were vacillating between that which was of God and that which was of the devil. “The heart was not right in such persons. It was not settled and determined in favor of religion, but vibrated between that and the world. The proper business of such persons, therefore, was to cleanse the heart from disturbing influences, that it might settle down in unwavering attachment to that which is good.”^{cxxxvii}

A double-minded man is a man who is looking both ways at the same time. I once invited Dr. Sam Gore, who was head of the Art Department at Mississippi College for forty years, to present come to our church and lead in a service. His sculptures have earned the former Art Educator of the Year international acclaim. At my invitation he had previously sculpted *the Mother and Child* and Christmas time and *the Head of Christ* with the crown of thorns at Easter. This time he sculpted something different. He called it *the Creation of Man*. There were three faces on the one piece of art, a Caucasian face, a Negroid face, and an Asian face, all facing out in different directions. As he turned the sculpture you could see each face clearly. This three faced sculpture was rare and unusual. A double-minded man is, sadly, neither rare nor unusual. James has already told us that “...a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (1:8).

4:9 - MOURN AND WEEP. “*Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom.*” The cleansing of verse 8 requires a serious spirit of confession and repentance. God is looking for genuine repentance instead of the frivolous attitude we so often have toward sin, especially in this day of TV comedians and other entertainers who champion every cause for cleaning up the air, but could care less about the air waves. The language James uses “implies a deep, intense sorrow like the mourning at a funeral. In 5:1, James tells the rich men to “weep and howl.” It is not enough simply to say you are sorry when you are dealing with God (Isa. 22:12, 13; Luke 6:25).”^{cxxxviii}

LAUGHTER TURNED INTO MOURNING. Laughter is often desirable (cf. Ps. 126:2), but not when it reflects worldly frivolity. There is a time for laughter and there is a time for tears. Sin is nothing to laugh about, and genuine repentance is not a laughing matter. It is possible that some of those to whom James was writing were laughing about their sins rather than weeping over them.. Who has not seen an interview with some beautiful actress who explains her promiscuity with a flippant, “Hey, its just sex.” The degree to which America has slid down the slippery slope of moral depravity was demonstrated graphically, if sadly, in the response of hundreds of thousand, if not millions of people who dismissed Bill Clinton’s gross immorality with an arrogant retort, “It was just sex. I think we should stay out of his sex life.”

It is bad enough when people sin without conviction, when they never weep over their sinfulness or seek to escape their guilt. It is another matter indeed when that which God condemns becomes popular entertainment for a whole nation. A person who is genuinely sorry for his sin will have a look of utter dejection and will be ashamed to look anyone in the eye. I recall a man who

came to our services many years ago and sat and wept. Following the benediction he sat down and wept over his sin. I remember once when I was trying to witness to him that when I looked up I looked into his wife's eyes and she shook her head and said rather lightly, "I don't know what's wrong with him." I did, and I felt that she did too. But she just was not bothered by it. The man would come just so close to calling on God for forgiveness, and back away. Several weeks later two of our deacons tried to visit with this man, but he wouldn't even let them enter his house. No longer was there any weeping or mourning over his sin. They faced a man who had made a choice and was becoming hardened in his lifestyle.

4:10 - HUMBLE YOURSELVES. *"Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you."* Humility is demanded of all who would come into the presence of God. It is a key to God's blessings. Peter wrote, "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5). Warren Wiersbe comments are worth reading:

Wars and fighting originate in pride; the wise Christian sows seed of peace (3:13-18). Pride puts us at a distance from God; pride defiles our hearts and our works. It is the sin of double-mindedness again, and this is basically lack of surrender. "Purify your hearts" (v. 8) carries the idea of having a chaste and faithful heart, not loving the world or grieving the Spirit. These believers were living in pleasure, surrounded with laughter and worldly joy. They needed to be sober and serious, putting sin out of their lives. James promises that if they humble themselves, God will lift them up. See Matt. 23:12, Luke 14:11, 1 Peter 5:6, and Prov. 29:23.^{cxxxix}

ILLUSTRATION: HUMILITY

A young seminary graduate came up to the lectern, very self confident and immaculately dressed. He began to deliver his first sermon in his first church and the words simply would not come out. Finally he burst into tears and ended up leaving the platform obviously humbled.

There were 2 older ladies sitting in the front row and one remarked to the other, "If he'd come in like he went out, he would have gone out like he came in."^{cxli}

ILLUSTRATION: HUMILITY

In Jesus divine omnipotence moved in a human arm;
In Jesus divine wisdom was cradled in a human brain;
In Jesus divine love throbbed in a human heart;
In Jesus divine compassion glistened in a human eye;
In Jesus divine grace poured forth in human lips.

-- Lloyd Cory, ed., *Quotable Quotations*, p. 61.^{cxli}

D. Selfish Strife and Worldliness Leads to Slander, 4:11-12.

4:11 - DO NOT SPEAK AGAINST ONE ANOTHER. *“Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it.”* James now moves on to the matter of criticism as he continues his instruction on the theme of trouble with control of the tongue. Whether it is criticism, slander, or quarreling, all the trouble we get into with our tongues can be traced right back to the selfish desires inside ourselves (4:1). To speak evil against a brother or sister in Christ is to violate some of the most specific demands of the law of God. Backbiting, gossip, and slander stand in direct opposition to principles set down in the Golden Rule and the Great Commission. However, when people are worldly minded and their hearts are filed with pride, they are often quick to criticize others - and convince themselves that they are justified in doing it. The conflicts among these Christians had their origin in their judging and speaking evil of one another. It is the old problem of the tongue (1:19-20, 26, and 3:5-6). Think how many churches have been divided and disgraced by hateful, critical tongues!

The Bible teaches us that we must have Christian discernment (1 Thes. 5:21-22; 1 John 4:1-6), but this does not mean that we can judge the hearts and motives of others. In Matt. 7:1-5, Jesus teaches that believers have the right to help others conquer their sins, but they must first judge their own sinfulness. If I have a plank in my eye, what right do I have to criticize the man who has a speck of dust in his eye? And I cannot see clearly enough to help him until I first take care of my own needs.^{cxlii}

SPEAKS AGAINST THE LAW. To judge another is in reality a judgment against the Law of God, and no one should ever dare assume a haughty position over the Law. “The slanderer is sentenced by the Law; the self-styled judge is jeopardized by the Law; only the humble person is honored. His Law is a mandate for all people and for every generation. True justice is rendered when a believer subjects himself to God in humility and obedience.”^{cxliii}

4:12 - ONE LAWGIVER *“There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?”* The word “Lawgiver” is a compound noun used only here in the New Testament. It means “to set, place, constitute, or lay down.” God not only set down the Law, He also administers it. “He serves as both the executive and judicial branches of the divine government. God is King; He institutes and declares His Law. God is Judge; He upholds and enforces His Law.”^{cxliv}

There is only One who has the right to give Law and there is only One who has the power to enforce His Law, and that is God. When we judge other Christians without love and mercy, we are making ourselves lawgivers; usurping the authority of the Lawgiver. “If all of us would devote ourselves to obeying the Word and not investigating to see how well others obey it, our churches would have harmony and peace. James suggests in v. 12 that the only one with the right to judge is the one with the power to punish—namely, God.”^{cxlv}

ABLE TO SAVE AND DESTROY. God, and He alone, is the One who is able to save and destroy. There is one Author of the Law, one Judge over the Law, and there is one Savior from the Law's condemnation. "This reminder of a truth well known by James' Jewish readers was also a rebuke to their haughty attitudes and judgmental actions."^{cxlvi}

E. Pure Religion Puts Things in Their Proper Perspective, 4:13-17.

4:13 - WE WILL GO. "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit...'" "Come now" (lit., "go now") introduces a new subject. "It is the same construction found in 5:1, a colloquial phrase used only by James in the New Testament. The interjection both goads the reader and gains his undivided attention."^{cxlvii} The person James has in mind is a typical businessman who makes his plans without considering God. "He is self-assertive in his travel plans: **we will go to this or that city**; self-confident in his time schedule, **spend a year there**; and self-centered in his trade relationships, carry on business and make money."^{cxlviii}

Let me stress one thing: I am not opposed to capitalism. I spent years studying Communism and I know it to be satanic in origin, demonic in theory, and diabolical practice. Communism honors Satan and dishonors Jesus Christ. Marxism, by its very profession is godless, classless, and stateless.

It is godless, but it is far from classless (there is always a small elite ruling class) and stateless (they just want to continue to enlarge their state through revolution).

At the same time, capitalism is not synonymous with Christianity. There are many capitalists who are greedy, many who are dishonest, many who make their living at the expense of those who are less fortunate. Capitalism, however, does provide Christians with many opportunities not available to them under most other systems (socialism, fascism, feudalism, anarchy). At the same time, Christian businessman faces many temptations. There are temptations to lie, cheat, and steal. There are those who simply do not even try to understand the needs of the poor, the handicapped, or the elderly poor who need medical attention they cannot afford - let the government take care of them!

These are not the sins condemned by James in this passage. There are many businessmen who are scrupulously honest, pay a good salary, and provide benefits for employees, yet they are guilty before God because they usurp the authority of God over their time, their energy, and their resources.

We must never plan without including God in our plans. A very good friend, the late Harold Doss of Bastrop, Louisiana, once donated a book to our church library. The book, written by Stanley Tam, was entitled, *God Owns My Business*, was a biographical account of Tam's salvation and commitment to Jesus Christ that led him to legally give his business to God. He drew a salary and gave all profits to Christian causes. Of course it took him some time to find a lawyer who took him seriously.

William Colgate, J. C. Penney and R. G. LeTourneau gave ninety percent of their income to God. Insurance executive A. L. Williams donated something like seventy million dollars to Liberty University to help provide young people with a Christian education. These men prove that a businessman or woman can include God in their plans. One wonders how the one billion dollars Ted Turner gave to the United Nations to promote globalism could be used by the International Missions Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. But make no mistake about one thing: God does not need Ted Turner, Ted Turner needs God.

We must be careful to avoid a sinful attitude toward wealthy men who made their fortunes honestly but do not use their money as we think they should. Someone made the point, "No poor person ever gave me a job." Wealthy industrialists, and computer moguls like Bill Gates provide jobs for thousands of people. God is not condemning their wealth any more than He condemns the genius behind their success. The problem addressed here is the selfish pursuit of wealth that does not consider God. The selfish pursuit of riches is condemned in this passage as James portrays a man standing before a map, looking for a place to go and make a quick fortune - a get-rich-quick scheme. He selects a city in an ideal location and says, "There is a city with a great trade opportunity. I will go there for a year and get in on the ground floor of a business and make my fortune and return a rich man."

In this section, the Lord warns against making long-range plans without consulting God. Your future is in His hands and to try to control the future is to usurp God's place, God's purpose, and even God's sovereignty. He alone controls the future because He is the only One Who knows the future.

This passage calls for some soul searching. Many Christians will never know the joy of their salvation because they are making selfish plans for the future. As you read and meditate on these verses you may need to set aside some time and consider your future - college, career or vocation, location, marriage, children, service, and retirement.

4:14 - YOU DO NOT KNOW. *"Whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away."* Only God knows what tomorrow holds. The Christian must reason, "I do not know what tomorrow holds, but I know Who holds tomorrow." Man's plans are tentative at best. His plans are not his own and his time is not his own. His life is not his own. He may think it is, but the Bible assures us that we are on this earth for a very brief period of time.

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE? We would do well to mark the question and the answer. After all, every person needs to focus on this question and countless professionals spend a life-time in pursuit of the answer. Regardless of the philosophical, sociological, and psychological answers, we must come back to this verse - life is "a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." The ultimate answer to the questions of life are spiritual.

I sat under some outstanding sociologists, including the late Dr. R. R. Pearce at Mississippi

College. I don't know how many times I heard him ask a question, and then say, "The preacher says it's sin." Why are there so many divorces? Why is there so much poverty? Why is there so much crime? "The preacher says it's sin. What do you think?" I think there are enough possibilities here to keep the sociologist, psychologist, and philosopher busy until the Lord returns. But the ultimate answer is theological. Without trying to sound trite, we must conclude, "God only knows." And God does know!

Robert McGhee has written a book entitled, *"The Search for Significance,"* in which he deals with many of the questions every rational person will ask. He reveals that many of our thoughts, actions, and dreams relate to our search for significance. He points out that what we need is not higher self-esteem, but a focus on Christ.^{cxlix} The more we comprehend the question and answer given here under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the more we should desire, first and foremost, to honor Jesus Christ and please Him above all else.

4:15 - IF THE LORD WILLS. *"Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.'* It is unfortunate that some students of the Word have concluded that Paul and James contradicted each other. To Martin Luther, who discovered in Paul's writings the truth that led him to faith in Jesus Christ, James is "an epistle of straw." The great reformer could not have been more wrong. In fact, James and Paul complement each other. For example, in all his travel plans, Paul used this expression (Acts 18:21; 1 Cor. 4:19)—but not always (Acts 19:21; Rom. 15:28; 1 Cor. 16:5, 8). Even when he did not use the words, it is obvious that he always conditioned his plans on the will of God.

One of my professors at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary told his class about a visit with his parents. When he announced that he was going to town to shop, his mother reminded him that he should have said, "If the Lord wills, I am going to town." He tried to explain that the words were unnecessary because he lived his life every day according to this principle.

One of my high school English teacher, Mrs. Robert ("Boots") Dean, began her lecture in Literature one year by telling us about the week she had spent at Ridgecrest Baptist Assembly near Asheville, North Carolina. The theme for the week, she informed us, was, "God Has a Plan, a Place, and a Purpose for Every Life." The ACLU has been very effective in freeing young people from such dangerous lectures in public schools today!

This verse unequivocally states that God has a will - a plan, a place, and a purpose - for every life. That being the case, it behooves us to seek His will in all things. Sometimes that is a simple matter. If He has stated it clearly in His Scripture - thou shalt, or thou shalt not - it simplifies the search for His will. If something is clearly stated in the Bible you do not even have to pray about it.

You will want to pray, however, concerning the application of His will and the power and direction of the Holy Spirit in the implementation of it. You do not have to ask if it is God's will for you to worship Him, but you will want to ask Him to prepare you for worship and to bless you in worship.

If the will of God is not stated clearly in Scripture, you must prayerfully seek the leadership of the Holy Spirit in finding His will. We are confronted with choices every day and the Christian

must ask for guidance. That is why we were given the Holy Spirit **when** we believed (Acts 19:2, correctly translated). I have two observations here. First, this is not to be used as some kind of formula in which we preface everything we say with the words, "If the Lord wills." This is the philosophy which governs the believer's life, the principle under which he operates. Second, finding God's will is not always a simple matter. Let me share two illustrations.

Bill Bennett resigned as pastor of a four thousand member church in North Carolina to return to New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary to pursue the Doctor of Theology degree. He audited our Greek class, took German at Tulane, and brushed up on his Hebrew in preparation for the program.. No doubt, many pastors who served churches with three or four hundred members wondered why he would leave such a large church to go back to school. Bill sat by me in Greek and we had an opportunity to visit a few minutes before classes. One day he told me that in all the big decisions of life, he prayed for guidance before making the decision, but that he had never received affirmation that he had made the right decision until after he had made it.

What a relief! That had often been my experience, but who among us has not heard people say, "God told me to do thus and so"? God does not always set up billboards along life's highway. They may be there, but they are not always as clear as the one Paul saw on the road to Damascus. The Christian travels by faith, not sight.

The second illustration is personal. I had moved from Bastrop, Louisiana to Nederland, Texas where I had been called as pastor of the Hillcrest Baptist Church, a church with a great history and, in my opinion, a greater future. It had been a difficult decision, because of the "overnight success" we had experienced after only several years of hard work at West Side Baptist Church in Bastrop. After becoming pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church I sustained an injury which should have been easily corrected, had I not chosen the wrong foot specialist - twice. I went to the first doctor with a minor problem in one foot and after two foot specialists finished their work the second foot was worse than the first. The people in Bastrop learned of my situation and concluded, "He stood by us when we were down, maybe the Lord wants us to stand by him now that he is down." They invited me to return as pastor.

The decision to return was not an easy one, but one afternoon I returned from my health club and announced to Becky, my wife, that I thought the Lord had given me His answer. What was the answer? It made sense to return to a smaller church so that I might have an opportunity to recuperate. They would give me time and assured me they would not demand things of me that I could not do until my feet healed.

When I announced my resignation, Bob Moore, one of our deacons, came by and spoke with me briefly. He later talked with me and told me that his shock was such that he could not talk with me the day I resigned. He said that he just could not believe it was God's will for me to resign. He told me he had prayed about it for some time, and then he opened the Living Bible to 1 Samuel 10:7, which is paraphrased something like this, "When you pray about something and you do not see any signs, you should make a decision based on what is reasonable under the circumstances." The NAS has, "And let it be, when these signs come to you, that you do as the occasion demands; for God is

with you.”

4:16 - YOU BOAST. *“But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.”* The word “boast” appears 46 times in 41 verses in the Bible. David wrote in Psalm 44:8, “In God we boast all day long, And praise Your name forever.” It is appropriate to boast in God. In is inappropriate to boast in the wrong things: “They utter speech, and speak insolent things; All the workers of iniquity boast in themselves” (Ps. 94:4). Solomon wrote, “Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth. Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips” (Pro. 27:1-2). Paul wrote, “Therefore let no one boast in men” (1 Cor. 3:21a).

In his book *The Witness is Withness*, David Augsburger told an imaginary story about a man who had just arrived in heaven. Attracted by a large crowd, he inquired what was going on, “Oh, it's 'show and tell' time,” came the answer. He was asked if he had anything he'd like to share. “Why sure,” the new arrival quickly responded, “I'll tell about the big flood we had back in 1889 when I was a boy in Pennsylvania.” “That will be fine,” he was told, “but remember, Noah will be in the audience.”^{cl}

Someone has made the point that “whales really do communicate with each other. One whale sounded the following caution to his dear mate: ‘Better watch it; when you get to the top and start to blow, that's when you get harpooned!’ What's true at sea is also true in our world.”^{cli}

IN YOUR ARROGANCE. We cannot pass over this verse without making note of the fact that the seed bed of boasting is human arrogance. Pride, criticism, and self-conceit go hand in hand. Wiersbe's comments provide a fitting summary for this section:

Humble people pray for God to help disobedient Christians, and they try to love them back to fellowship with Christ. The humble know how to say “If the Lord wills” as they make their plans day by day. But these believers were boasting of their plans and anticipated success. They would go to the big city, set up business, and come back wealthy! He warns them that this carnal boasting and self-confidence is dangerous.^{clii}

We know nothing about tomorrow; we do not even know that there will be a tomorrow for us. In fact, we do not know that there will be a tomorrow in this world for anyone. Only God knows. Wiersbe continues:

The person who boasts about tomorrow is claiming to be God! Furthermore, life itself is uncertain—a cloud that quickly comes and goes (Job 7:7; Ps. 102:3). We do not even know when life will end, so how can we be so confident? We ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live...” Every believer needs to keep before his or her eyes an awareness of the brevity of life. “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Ps. 90:12). Boasting about an unknown future

is sin. Yet so many people make their plans without praying or seeking the mind of God. They live like the worldly sinner who thinks he has security for the future, but discovers he has lost everything (Luke 12:15-21).^{cliii}

Edythe Draper (*Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World*; Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992) shares some interesting quotes on arrogance:

A know-it-all always seems to have the solution to every problem right in the hollow of his head.

A smart aleck knows everything, except how to keep others from thinking him a fool.

Arrogance has its own built-in misery. The arrogant person may offend others, but he hurts himself more. Billy Graham (1918–)

When two know-it-alls get together; why do they always disagree?^{cliv}

4:17 - TO HIM WHO KNOWS TO DO GOOD. *“Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.”* There goes man’s pride! This verse sums up the chapter and points out that we can sin by neglecting to do the things we should, just as surely as we can by deliberate action. The Puritans were right when they talked about “sins of commission” and “sins of omission.” We sin when we do the things we should not do, but we also sin when we neglect to do the things we should. Is it any wonder that Paul would write, “We all **have** sinned, and **come short** of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23, emphasis added)? Life is so brief that we can ill afford to waste any of it. If we would make our lives count for Christ before our death or His returns, we must try to live each day to the fullest for Him..

The sin of omission is nowhere stated more clearly than here. It is very easy to “commit” a sin of omission. All you have to do is nothing. Sometimes the sinner is keenly aware of the fact that he is sinning when does not do what he should, but at other times he may not be aware of it until he is convicted of it by the Holy Spirit later. It is also possible that one may really be unsure that he is guilty of a sin of omission. A good rule of thumb is, “When in doubt, repent!”

A person does not get anywhere with God by merely knowing what he wants, but by doing what he says. There is not a bit of difference between people who know God’s word and do not obey it and those who have never even heard it. God calls them all sinners. The danger in hearing what God says so often and not doing it is that one gets calloused and loses his sensitivity to sin.^{clv}

There are times when the sin of omission is easily detected. I remember a blatant example from my childhood. Joe was a handsome young man of twenty whom my grandfather had tried to lead to Jesus Christ. Joe, however, told him that he was having too much fun to become a Christian. When he got older, he explained, he might want to become a Christian. Joe drowned when a john boat capsized with him as he crossed Cold Water River near Sledge, Mississippi. Two girls were in

the boat with him; one swam to the nearest bank and he managed to push the other one into some vines, saving her from the strong current, but as he push her into the vines near the bank, he was forced back into the current. Joe drowned while his best friend sat on the river bank and watched. His friend had been a swimming instructor in the navy, but he made no effort to save Joe. I do not know that the friend could have saved him, but adults I knew were convinced that he could have. The point was that he made no effort. The friend had been drinking, which was probably a factor. What I remember is that people in the area were convinced that Joe's friend was guilty of a sin of omission.

Perhaps it would be a good exercise to prepare a list of ways in which we - not others, but we - commit sins of omission. If a parent neglects his child, he may be guilty of a sin of commission, or a sin of omission, depending on the circumstances. To fail to check on an elderly neighbor during an ice storm may be a sin of omission.

CHAPTER V

I. A WARNING TO THOSE WHO TRUST IN MATERIAL WEALTH, 5:1-6.

A. God's Judgement Will Be Severe for Those Who Trust in Riches, 5:1.

5:1 - COME NOW. *"Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you!"* James opens this subject with the same attention getter he used in 4:13. James was addressing wealthy Jewish men who were known for how much money they had rather than for the good they did with it. These wealthy employers were in a position to cause serious problems to Jews who became Christians. Does James seriously think these rich Jews who rejected Christ were going to read this epistle and be frightened by it? Or, was he speaking out against rich Jews, less for their sake than for the sake of the Christians who were being persecuted by them? There is one thing we can be sure of, and that is that this has an application to the wealthy today who would use their wealth in any way as to discriminate against another person.

YOU RICH. Liberal politicians have used class envy as a primary tool in dividing the American society, pitting the haves against the have-nots to serve their own political purpose. They are willing to sacrifice our culture on the altar of their own ambition. Let us mark this down: it is a sin for a rich person to hate or abuse a poor person - and it is a sin for a poor person to hate or envy a rich person. If all wealth were redistributed throughout America it would only be a matter of time before a similar percentage of people would become rich and a similar number would become poor. The poor "ye have with you always" - and the rich you have with you always.

Politicians, playing on the envy that comes so naturally to fallen man, often play the green

card (greenbacks) to gain support of the masses - there are a lot more votes in the “masses” category than in the wealthy class. We hear the cries in every national race, “soak the rich,” “tax the rich,” “make the rich pay their share.” We often hear a politician today accuse his opponent of wanting to protect the wealthiest among us and tax the poorest. “I, on the other hand,” he says, “want to give the poor a tax break and make the wealthy pay their fair share.” What is wrong with that? What’s wrong with that is that it is wrong! Studies reveal that a small percentage of our citizens pay an overwhelming percentage of taxes and the poorest pay no taxes at all. In fact, the federal government taxes the wealthiest among us so that they can send the poorest among us an earned income credit check - some receive as much as three to four thousand dollars a year. How does the federal government get the money to give to the poor? They get it from the wealthiest - and from the middle income taxpayers. With this in mind, what do you think of the poor person who envies, resents, or even hates the taxpayer from whom the money is taken to supplement their income?

Many millionaires in America did not start out with money - the so-called self-made missionaries. Rush Limbaugh, for example, says that he was fired from six or seven different jobs before his hit on the right venture and the right radio format that enabled him to become the most listened to talk show host in radio history. Many who have achieved a measure of success and accumulated a moderate amount of wealth have been the ones who came up with the right idea or product at the right time and then they worked sixty to eighty hours a week for years in order to reach their level of affluence. We recognize and even admire athletes, singers, and actors who achieve an unusual amount of success, so why not appreciate the individual who was blessed with a talent for success in business. We cheer when a basketball player signs a six year contract for one hundred-fifty million dollars, but fail to appreciate the farmer, builder, or computer genius who achieves anything more than a modest amount of success.

Stop and ask yourself one question: How many truly poor people have ever given you a job. Is it a sin to be wealthy? As I mentioned earlier in this study, J. C. Penney, R. G. LeTourneau, and William Colgate hired bookkeepers to figure their tithe. What, you may ask, is so unusual about that since they were so rich? What is so unusual is that they gave the Lord ninety percent and kept ten percent for themselves.

Why then are the rich mentioned in this very unfavorable light in this passage? The answer is both simple and obvious. Not only are the very poor not able to provide jobs, they are in no position to abuse laborers, and those less fortunate. The fact that a person has wealth does not mean that he abuses those less fortunate, but he is often in a position to do so - and throughout history many have done so.

The stock markets took investors on a roller coaster ride after the US Justice Department “went after” Bill Gates. There had been no charges, no requests by competitors, and no complaints of a monopoly by citizens, yet the Justice Department set out to break up the biggest company in the country. The action reduced Gates’ wealth by many billions of dollars. It also had a devastating effect on retirement investments of poor and middle income families. Furthermore, if it were not for the taxes paid by Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, and other wealthy people a lot of able-bodied poor people would be cut from welfare rolls and forced to work for a living.

There is one more thing we need to remember when we read this verse. In the First Century there were two economic classes, the rich and the poor, no middle class as we know it today. Often the rich made their fortune at the expense of the poor, who had no protection as most people do in America. Rich people today often take advantage of the poor, but there are limits in America that they did not know in the Roman world of James' day.

This is neither a defense of the poor or the rich, but an appeal to avoid the temptations associated with class envy. Jealousy and envy will devour the heart that nurtures it. Jealousy is usually directed toward one's peers, envy toward those who are more affluent, more powerful, or more popular. In any case, these are sins for which there is always a temptation. God's people are warned to avoid these temptations, and you can be sure that you will never be led into these temptations by following the One Who had no place to lay His head.

WEEP AND HOWL. This means to scream or shriek in terror. James may be speaking prophetically of "the destruction that was coming upon the Jews, not only in Judea, but in all the provinces where they sojourned. He seems here to assume the very air and character of a prophet; and in the most dignified language and peculiarly expressive and energetic images, foretells the desolations that were coming upon this bad people."^{clvi} Jerusalem would fall to Titus and his Roman legions in A. D. 70 after a long siege that saw the city decimated by famine, conspiracies, and political plots before the walls were breached. Many more would take their own lives on Masada rather than surrender to the Romans.

Wealthy Jews in Spain had their property taken from them by envious neighbors. Some converted to Christianity to avoid confiscation of their property, but a lot of Jews were loaded on ships that sailed through passed the Rock of Gibraltar about the time Christopher Columbus was beginning the voyage that would lead him to the New World. The Twentieth Century saw a serious effort to exterminate the Jews of Europe. Evil leaders like Hitler and Stalin may have hated the Jews if they had all been poor, but the money and possessions of the wealthier Jews had attracted the attention of their neighbors.

This has an application for our age. The rich and powerful may in this world live the lifestyle of the rich and famous, but if their god is gold they are going suffer in hell forever. Judgment in this world can be very severe, but those who reject God and abuse the defenseless will spend their eternity in hell where "there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:50). Jesus warned, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:25). But that which is impossible with man is possible with God.

Now, consider just who James is telling to weep and howl - and why. In verses 2-6 we find that these are the ones who are guilty of hoarding riches, 2-3; committing acts injustice against their laborers, vs. 4; sinful extravagance, vs. 5; and violence against others, vs. 6. Note that James did not say that these people are to weep and howl because they possessed wealth. Abraham was a very wealthy man, as was Job. Solomon was not only the wisest of men, he was also among the wealthiest people who have ever inhabited the earth. There are wealthy people who have never defrauded, stolen, cheated, or forcefully taken property from others, who are included in this

category for the simple reason that they did not trust Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. It is easy to let one's possessions get between them and God, and they do not have to possess a great fortune or a lot of property to be guilty. A simple house, a sport car, a camp on the lake, or a hunting lease can get between an individual and God.

MISERIES. The judgment of God will cause frenzied terror. Jonathan Edwards was the key instrument God used to bring about The Great Awakening of his day in America. This spiritual revival came at a time when there were many unsaved people in the country and the church was filled with complacent, if not apathetic church members. Emphasis was upon doing religious things rather than being born again. Jonathan Edwards preached the most famous sermon since Pentecost on the judgment of God, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. I might add, Edwards preached that sermon once, as far as I know. R. G. Lee preached *Payday Someday* over twelve hundred times! Sadly, modern university professors have pointed to Edwards' sermon as an illustration of the narrow minded view of ministers of the day, and Jonathan Edwards in particular.

Someone once told me how his English professor had cited this sermon as an example of the narrow minded bigotry, emotionalism, and fear tactics of the Puritans. I asked him if he realized that Jonathan Edwards preached that sermon to a crowd that boasted of running off all preachers, and that Edwards never raised his voice and he never used a gesture while delivering the sermon. He was neither aware of that fact, nor the fact that hardened sinners, with a sense that they were sliding into hell, were holding onto pillars and door facings. What happened there can only be attributed to the power of the Holy Spirit.

B. Reasons for the Judgment, 5:2-6.

1. They hoarded riches, 2-3.
2. Injustice to their laborers, 4.
3. Sinful extravagance, 5.
4. Violent acts against others, 6.

5:2 - YOUR RICHES ARE CORRUPTED. *"Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten."* They hoarded riches only to see them depreciate, corrode, rust, or lost in some other way. The word here translated "corrupted" does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament. It means, to cause to rot, to corrupt, to destroy.

The reference here is to their hoarded treasures; and the idea is, that they had accumulated more than they needed for their own use; and that, instead of distributing them to do good to others, or employing them in any useful way, they kept them until they rotted or spoiled. It is to be remembered, that a considerable part of the treasures which a man in the East would lay up, consisted of perishable materials, as garments, grain, oil, etc. Such articles of property were often stored up, expecting that they would furnish a supply for many years, in case of the prevalence of famine or wars. Compare Luke 12:18-19. A suitable provision for the time to

come cannot be forbidden; but the reference here is to cases in which great quantities had been laid up, perhaps while the poor were suffering, and which were kept until they became worthless.^{clvii}

YOUR GARMENTS ARE MOTH-EATEN. Expensive garments were worn by some wealthy individuals as a testimony to their riches. Achan sinned because of he coveted such “ beautiful mantle from Shinar”:

And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it (Joshua 7:20-21, KJV).

They made a show of their wealth, but it would eventually be gone, regardless of how carefully they hoarded it. In a day when there were no welfare programs, no earned income tax programs, no social security, no Medicare program, it was God’s plan for His people to provide for those in need. This was not to have been a government program in which politician take money from producers and give it to non-producers, as happens all the time in America. It was not God’s purpose for lazy people with no incentive to be parasites, feeding of those who worked. Paul is very clear about that - “If a man will not work do not let him eat.” That would get a lot of people off the streets. The issue here is not a free ride for the will-nots, but a hand up for the can-nots.

Remember that there were two classes of people - the rich and the poor, often the very rich and the very poor. In that society the poor were at the mercy of the rich and if the rich person had no mercy, the poor suffered. The picture here is of a wealthy person who hoards his money or flaunts his possessions in front of the needy who he callously ignores at best, refuses, or possibly swindles. He buys expense robes to flaunt his wealth only to have them eaten by moths.

5:3 - A WITNESS AGAINST YOU. *“Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.”* The corroded coins, like the moth-eaten garments stood as a testimony to the fact that their whole lives were spent accumulating something that did not do them any good. One today might hoard his money, or accumulate property only to have inheritance taxes take a major part of it at his death. Others live a miserly life, never believing that at their death their heirs will squander it - and some do just that.

EAT YOUR FLESH AS IT WERE FIRE. “Just as the process of decay devoured their wealth, the awareness of the futility of all they have done will eat away at their minds.”^{clviii} I was Jack Witcher’s pastor for fifteen years. Jack grew sweet potatoes in West Carroll and Morehouse Parishes in northeast Louisiana. He also planted other crops. He had the reputation of being one of the hardest working men in the parish, and I discovered that he was also one of the most generous. I was regularly the beneficiary both of his hard work and his generosity. He kept me supplied with sweet potatoes, tomatoes, cantaloupes, peas, okra, and squash. There was a tomato shed on his home

place and when I asked about it he told me that back in the sixties and early seventies he sold about one hundred dollars worth of tomatoes each year. That ended when he discovered that high school students would no longer do the hard work necessary to gather, grade, and pack the tomatoes. Then he told me that one year he lost practically his whole crop - one hundred thousand dollars worth of tomatoes - when it was hit by a hail storm. A visitor asked him how he could stand to lose that much money. He answered, "Well, if you don't have it you can't lose it." He was not a person to boast of money or possessions. He was saying that when you operate on this level you have to expect to lose some of it at times. As wealth increases the risks increase with it.

Several years later he left a half-million dollars worth of sweet potatoes in the field one Fall when a hurricane pushed rains into the area and the rains continued until practically the whole crop rotted in the field. It was a major set back for him and his family, but he did not quit. I was disappointed for him, but it showed me how easily one could have a crop like that so close to harvesting it that he can almost see it in the warehouse, only to have it destroyed by something over which he has no control.

HEAPED UP TREASURE TOGETHER FOR THE LAST DAYS. In Luke 12:19, the rich man's act of treasuring up wealth is matched by God's act of storing up wrath, and that wrath will be poured out on him in God's judgment.

5:4 - PAY...WITHHELD. *"Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth."* James now reinforces the seriousness of what he has been saying by use of "behold." They may not want to hear him, but they should know that God has heard the cries of the people they have oppressed. It is not the wealth itself that is condemned, but "their greedy attitude toward it and the grisly actions with which it was obtained. God is not deaf to the cries of injustice that rise both from wages withheld in fraud and from the laborers who have been oppressed by the rich."^{clix} The Jewish converts were well aware of God's Law forbidding holding back on wages (Lev. 19:13; Deut. 24:15) and oppressing the poor (Prov. 3:27-28; Amos 8:4-6; Mal. 3:5).

ILLUSTRATION:

There was a very wealthy man who lived in a neighboring county when I was growing up in the Mississippi Delta. Everywhere you went you heard stories about the eccentric millionaire who drove an old pick-up, and dressed like a share-cropper. From time to time he amazed the bigger plantation owners in the area with his purchases and investments. Once a man and his family moved into a house on our farm and worked for my father. I mentioned Mr. James P. Michael's name (not his real name) to our new friend and he told me he knew the man. When I asked about him I expected to hear another humorous story about the miserly old man. Instead, the farm hand told me he had lived on Mr. Michael's place and worked in his cotton gin in the Fall. One payday, he discovered an error. He went to his boss and told him that he was short fifty cents, and showed him the figures - there was no question about it, he was short fifty cents, a significant amount when a man worked for three dollars a day. Mr. Michael looked up from his desk and asked, "Well, what do you want me to do about it?" The laborer said, "I want my money." His boss said, "Son, I expect

you better move.”

This wealthy farmer kept his son in a tenant house, working him like a share-cropper because he believed his son would waste his money. He often invested large sums for his daughter, but not for his son. But when he died and his son took over the entire farm.

A friend told me that he knew a farmer (planter) who would take a stack of silver dollars and settle with all his share-croppers, showing what he had sold and what he owed the planter before finally handing him ten silver dollars. Those men are dead now, and neither of them took any of the money with them.

5:5 - YOU HAVE LIVED ON THE EARTH IN PLEASURE. *“You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.”* They lived the lifestyle of the rich and famous, contemptuous of the poor and insensitive to their needs. To appreciate this, read the story of The Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16.

FATTENED YOUR HEARTS. This a rather sarcastic illustration but a vivid one for these Jewish believers who had seen many fattened sheep and oxen meet their fates in sacrifice and for celebrations. This reminds us of the charge God made against the women of Israel, delivered by the prophet Amos, when He called the “king of Bashan”- a bunch of fat cows! (Amos 4:1).

It is tragic when a Christian lives in such harmony with the world that the principles set down in this section seem strange to him. James has asked in 4:4, “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?” If the believer is friendly with the world this principle seems too narrow, but we must know that wealth can be a trap. Does it ever occur to us that wealth may have been denied some of us to keep us out of that trap?

Wealth does not have to be a trap. As one man said to me, “Money is just a tool. If you tell me how much Diesel I have I can tell you what I can do with it. Money is simply a tool to be used.” That man’s house, cars, his children’s cars, and numerous other things spoke of his wealth. Too many people think that they can handle any amount of money, property, of stock. Only other people, obviously lacking their intelligence and values, would let wealth become a problem to them!

There are three sources of temptation, the flesh, the world, and Satan. That does not mean that your temptation comes only from one of these sources at the time. Satan can orchestrate temptations, using any one or all of them at any time. However, you would sin, if the devil took a leave of absence, which of course he will never do. As long as an individual is walking in the flesh and maintaining a friendship with the world, Satan has him where he wants him.

5:6 - MURDERED THE JUST. *“You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.”* Is he serious? Had some of these wealthy Jews actually “murdered the just” without having to answer to the courts? Certainly, Jezebel had Naboth murdered so that Ahab could have his vineyard. These men may have been more subtle than that. In their quest for more wealth, the some

of these rich people had used their influence in courts of justice, and in the process they were guilty of bringing condemnation and even death to innocent (just) men who offered no resistance. “What began as an interest in money ended as an insensitivity to murder. A believer who seeks spiritual growth dare not become caught up in the accumulation of wealth for himself. He should share his possessions for God’s glory and the good of others.”^{clx}

II. HOPE IN THE LORD’S RETURN ENCOURAGES PATIENCE, 5:7-12.

A. The Second Coming Gives Hope and Develops Patience, 7-9.

5:7 - BE PATIENT BRETHERN. *“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain.”* At this point James turns from the rich men, about whom he has been writing, to the believers. In the rest of the chapter he is talking to Christians.

In view of the coming judgment (5:1, 3), James encouraged the oppressed brethren to follow the example of their brothers who died without defending themselves (5:6). The word “patient” denotes “a willingness to remain under” (determination to bear up under trials without giving up). It points to stability and perseverance under trying circumstances. James is aware of the suffering facing most Christians of his day, many were persecuted and many others were martyred for the cause of Christ. Through the centuries countless thousands have died for Christ, and millions have paid a high price for following Him. Believers must always be aware of the fact that the world is the enemy of Jesus Christ and of those who follow Him. When persecution comes, James exhorts us to be steadfast and courageous, bearing up under the suffering for the greater glory of Jesus Christ.

“Patience” in the New Testament is positive and active, not negative or passive, not what the modern English word implies. It does not mean that you can listen to someone tap on a desk with a pencil without “freaking out.” It denotes a willingness to bear up under trials, suffering, or persecution. We can bear up under our circumstance with the full knowledge that when Jesus comes again all things will be set right with His children.

UNTIL THE COMING OF THE LORD. James encourages these suffering saints to keep their eyes on the promised return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Throughout the New Testament, Christians who are facing trials are encouraged to keep their eyes on the Lord, look to the Second Coming of Christ, and trust Him to take care of them. Paul deals specifically with this in his letters to the church at Thessalonica (see 1 Thes. 4:13-18).

5:8 - BE PATIENT. *“You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”* As we have seen in verse 7, the word “patient” does not mean that they were to sit idly by, doing nothing. It does not mean to bury one’s head in the sand and pretend all his troubles will simply go away. The word carries the idea of endurance, or steadfastness, a willingness to bearing the burdens and trials, and fight the battles every Christian must face until the Lord returns. James

uses several illustrations to hammer home this lesson of patience.

(1) There is the farmer (verses 7-8). The farmer plants the seed and prepares the soil but does not reap a crop immediately. God sends the rains to water the soil, and then comes the harvest. (The early rain came in October and November and the latter rain in April and May.) Even so, the Christian must be patient, knowing that “in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9).

(2) The judge (v. 9). Apparently their trials had made some of the Christians critical, and complainers emerged in the church. James reminds them that they are not to judge; Christ, the Judge, is at the door! He hears what is said, and He will come quickly and make things right. Murmuring and complaining is a serious sin among God’s people. If we would all remember that Christ is coming, we would not complain and criticize so much.

(3) The prophets (vv. 10-11). James refers these Christians to the OT believers, who suffered under the hands of sinners yet left their trials with God and won the victory. Job is the classic example. God had a wonderful purpose and result in mind when He permitted Job to be tried, even though Job did not understand what God was doing. Regardless of what trials may come to our lives, we know that God is full of love and mercy and that all things work together for good.^{clxi}

THE COMING OF THE LORD. From Corinth, Paul wrote two epistles to the church at Thessalonica, encouraging them to look to the coming of the Lord, and to straighten out misconceptions and false teachings about the Second Coming. Later, from Ephesus he would write to the church at Corinth to declare to the believers there the truth about the return of the Lord. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible makes a valid point:

The perfect tense of the Greek verb here expresses the idea of something that is present and imminent. In other words, *the Christian should be continually conscious that Christ’s coming is near*. Nothing can make you forget your present problems faster than to remember that he could come any minute, and yet that knowledge should be a constant awareness and settled fact in the mind of every Christian (emphasis added).^{clxii}

5:9 - DO NOT COMPLAIN. “*Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.*” Once again James uses the familiar, “brethren,” showing that he is not lording it over them. He is a Jewish believer writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to other Jewish believers. The Greek verb translated “complain” here means to “groan.” This points, not open criticism of someone, but

a muffled mutter, a complaint under your breath that says you disapprove of someone or something but don’t have the courage to confront him with it. James wants these Christians to exhibit the same kind of patience in putting up with the shortcomings of

their brothers as they do in tolerating the injustices of non-Christians (5:6). Some Christians find it harder to put up with other Christians than with people of the world.^{clxiii}

SO THAT YOU YOURSELVES MAY NOT BE JUDGED. There are few things that are more unpleasant than a judgmental person. There are those who continually attribute ulterior motive to others. There is a striking difference between a discerning spirit and a judgmental attitude. One is a gift of the Spirit, the other usurps the authority of the Holy Spirit. Jesus warns about judging others:

Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at 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," and behold, the log is in your own eye? (Matt. 7:1-4).

Paul wrote to the church at Rome:

But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD." So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God (Rom. 14:10-12).

THE JUDGE IS STANDING AT THE DOOR! Other Scriptures use the same picture (Gen. 4:7; Matt. 24:33; Ps. 24:7). Because of their hope of the Lord's imminent return, believers should cease the petty conflicts to which James alluded in chapter 4. "As children in a school classroom look out for their teacher's soon return, God's children should be on guard for Christ's return. In so doing, good behavior and mutual harmony are essential."^{clxiv} When Christ came the first time He came as Suffering Servant, but when He comes again, He will not come as a suffering Servant, but as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He will also come as Judge.

B. Patience Is Illustrated, 10-11.

5:10 - THE PROPHETS...AN EXAMPLE. *"My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience."* They were well aware of their history, a history taught in the synagogue schools and in their homes. The Jews knew their history as no other people ever had, and one reason they knew their history so well was the written message of the prophets. They knew the writing prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and Micah, and they knew the non-writing prophets like Elijah, Elisha, and Nathan. They knew that these prophets had declared the "Thus saith the word of the Lord" to their forefathers.

Those prophets had spoken to their forefathers by the authority of God, and they had been

persecuted by the very people to whom they delivered God's message. They suffered affliction and persecution with patience, faith, and courage. James holds these prophets up to the First Century Jewish Christians as an example because they served faithfully and trusted in the Lord's judgment. These believers would set an example for all Christians throughout the ages whose faith in Jesus Christ would lead to exclusion, discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom.

5:11 - BLESSED. *"We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful."* Many believers may be called upon to endure hardships and trials, and some will be subjected to persecution for the glory of God. To any student of the Word of God this calls to mind the Beatitudes:

Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matt. 5:10-12).

ENDURED. There are two kinds of patience. The Greek word here is similar to, but not the same as, the word for "patience" in 5:10. The word is properly translated "endurance" here. There are people who show a very passive patience in accepting their lot in life, while others "actively endure what God has for them. That is the kind of patience these prophets demonstrated. James uses the same Greek word in 1:3 when he talks about patience that actively grows."^{clxv} There are people who never seem to accept their circumstances in life - they try to change the things they cannot accept. Others who seem to resign themselves to their circumstances - accept the things they cannot change. Jesus is our supreme example in dealing with suffering, deprivation, and persecution, and even death for the Father, but the early church was filled with noteworthy examples. Not the least of these was the Apostle Paul, whose philosophy of life was, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). For Paul life consisted of service to his Lord. James had already written:

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4).

THE ENDURANCE OF JOB. Job was stripped of all his worldly possessions, "deprived at a stroke of all his children, tortured in body with sore disease, tempted by the devil, harassed by his wife, and calumniated by his friends, he nevertheless held fast his integrity, resigned himself to the Divine dispensations, and charged not God foolishly."^{clxvi} Because of this he is one of the most illustrious examples of those who demonstrate patience in suffering (see Job 1:21). The book of Job was written, among other reasons, to show that genuine faith in God can, and will, bear any form of trial to which it could be subjected (see Job 1:9-11; 2:5-6).

THE OUTCOME. The NIV has, "what the Lord finally brought about." Job's suffering had

been very intense, but in the end we see that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful. We cannot always see how our trials honor or glorify God, just as we cannot always see how they benefit us, but by faith we can know that in “the outcome” we will see “the Lord’s dealings.” He wants us to learn to endure every trial to the end, with faith that in the end we will understand His compassion and mercy.

The issue to which God brought all of his afflictions and trials, giving him children, increasing his property, lengthening out his life, and multiplying to him every kind of spiritual and secular good. This was God’s end with respect to him; but the devil’s end was to drive him to despair, and to cause him to blaspheme his Maker. This mention of Job shows him to have been a real person; for a fictitious person would not have been produced as an example of any virtue so highly important as that of patience and perseverance. The end of the Lord is a Hebraism for the issue to which God brings any thing or business.^{clxvii}

How many times have you prayed for something, only to later see that it was for your good that you did not receive what you requested? Paul wrote, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). Paul did not say that everything that happens is good, but that God would work out all things out for our highest good.

FULL OF COMPASSION. Just as the Lord was filled with compassion for Job, we know He will be full of compassion for us. God demonstrates His compassion for us by not giving us more troubles than we can handle, and he proves his mercy by taking us out of all troubles in the end. The weak, backslidden Christians may be confused when he sees a Christian suffer - especially if he is that Christian. Who has not wondered why he or she has had to go through certain trials if God really cares?

As a youth and a young adult I was very physical, so when errors by two “foot specialists” who almost totaled me out, I had to learn to deal with pain, limitations, anxiety about work and family, and an adjustment in the way I lived my life. I had a wife and two young sons and I did not know if I would be able to continue in the pastorate very long. I had always preached that you can trust the Lord to provide whatever we need; ask anything in Jesus’ name and God will hear and answer you. I quoted my favorite prayer verses - “The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (KJV). The problem was, the more fervently I prayed the worse it got! How do you explain that? How was God showing His compassion? After all, I was quoting Him Scripture - in a sense, I was painting Him into a corner! Then I recalled that we are warned against putting God to the test.

There was no sudden breakthrough in my case. For years I had to use a wheel chair to make hospital calls. I had to depend on my wife and my sons to help me carry on my work. When John started to Mississippi College a deacon asked me, “How are you going to do your work without John?” It was a good question, but he was not the first to ask it of me. I had already asked it. Then, for some reason I decided that I would try a new pair of shoes I had bought and then discarded - one

of many pairs I bought and then discovered that while they felt good for a few minutes, they extended my damage if I wore them very long. That morning I took off my ripple soled orthopedic shoes and put on another pair of shoes and drove to Bastrop, Louisiana to make a hospital call. I was dreading it, not because of the pain - I knew I could handle the pain - but because of the fear of creating new strains that would require days or weeks to regain the ground I had gained. I walked into the hospital in Bastrop and then drove to Rayville and made another hospital call there. I put aside those old ripple soled shoes my orthopedist had prescribed and began walking a little more, and with a little less pain.

Mark, my younger son, took a lot of the pressure off me, running errands, helping me with hospital and nursing home calls, and helping with projects around the house. Then Mark went to Mississippi College. How was I going to do my work? Once again, the Lord lifted me to a new level and enabled me to continue. I continued to wrestle with work and pain, therapy and pain, new shoes and more pain. I continued sitting on a barstool to preach and would for many years. I took it with me when I preached in other churches or led Bible conferences in other places.

Pain and inactivity were my constant companion, but at various times when I need a new step the Lord provided it. Early in the year 2000, I stood and preached at a morning worship service. After another week or two I stood for both services, and I have stood for every service since - after twenty-six years! If the Lord had healed me when I asked him to I would have been happy - and if I had had any way of knowing what the next quarter of a century would be like I would have been ecstatic.

There are many things, however, that I would have missed if the Lord had healed me when I first asked Him for healing. I had an opportunity to explore the world of pain, physical limitations, and adjustments to my conditions. When I was trying to decide what subject to chose for the mayor writing project for the Doctor of Ministry degree at Luther Rice Seminary, I had a deep sense of need to try to use my experience to help others. I read a lot about terminal illness - that did not fit my situation. I read about permanent disabilities and how to adjust to changes demanded you forced retirement, reduced income, and changes in relationships. This did not fit me - well, partially, but not completely. In all the books there was one emphasis. Once you understand what your problem is you have to accept it. My problem was that I did not know what to accept. To accept limitations that should not be accepted is to limit yourself too much in the long run.

I was prayerfully considering my condition and the major writing project when it suddenly became very clear to me - I had to accept the fact that I did not know what to accept! I had to accept the uncertainty of it all. I chose for my title, **HELP FOR LONG TERM SEMI-DISABLED PERSONS**. My condition was not terminal and it was not one of those chronic conditions that "comes and goes." As to whether or not it would be permanent, only time would tell, but I had my title and while writing and rewriting that book I found a lot of answers for myself, and suggested help for others.

I do not know what the final "outcome" will be, but I can testify to the fact that God has shown Himself to be "full of compassion." He has blessed me with a measure of healing when I had

to have it, and finally after all these years He has lifted me up from that barstool and enabled me to stand on my own two feet to preach the Gospel. At a time when I might be thinking of winding down my schedule, I have been elected to serve on the Executive Board of the Louisiana Baptist Convention and the Board of Trustees of LifeWay Christian Resources. I have published my first book (*UNDEFEATED: Finding Peace in a World Full of Trouble*) under the general umbrella, *The Bible Notebook*, and I have written studies like this on many other books of the Bible. I have also been added to the faculty of the Cambridge Graduate School. A compassionate and merciful God has kept me going so that I can serve Him. He has blessed me with a family whose supported has enabled me to serve Him. He has seen me through a heart attack and by-pass surgery and returned me to serve Him. He has so blessed me that I really have no great desire to do anything else but worship Him, serve Him, and honor Him.

C. Swearing Is Prohibited, 12.

5:12 -DO NOT SWEAR. *“But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your ‘Yes,’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No,’ lest you fall into judgment.”* Not all oaths are prohibited by this verse, only flippant, profane, or blasphemous ones. Oaths in the sense of solemn affirmations were enjoined in the law (Ex. 22:11). This verse resounds the words of Jesus in Matt. 5:33-37. When read against the context of all Scripture, it is clear that James here is not forbidding the taking of a solemn oath in a court of law. However, both Jesus and James stress the need for integrity in speech, “and the sinfulness of carelessly or flippantly using God's name or a sacred object to guarantee truthful speech.”^{clxviii}

I do not like to hear profanity - in fact I hate it. It is senseless, pointless, offensive, serving only the ego from which it springs. A highly respected psychiatrist and head of a state mental institution, once told me that people drink for the same reason they use profanity - an inferiority complex. Pop-psychology today calls it low self-esteem. It is my conviction that one can have an inferiority complex in certain areas, or with certain people, and at the same time hold a very high view of himself. Bad behavior is often more a matter of high self-esteem than low self-esteem. What ever the case, profanity is offensive, pointless, and sinful.

To a Christian, “yes” should mean “yes” and “no” should mean “no”, and no amount of swearing will reinforce his or her word. The question is, what does this have to do with the subject at hand? “Swearing should be the farthest thing from a Christian who is practicing patience. Even in difficult situations (5:10, 11) the Christian should have his tongue under control (Matt. 5:33-37). In 5:13 James implies that when troubles come you should talk to God about them, instead of blaming him for them.”^{clxix} Faith in the compassion and mercy of God prohibits swearing. Faith recognizes and honors God, swearing dishonors Him and refuses to acknowledge His sovereignty.

LEST YOU FALL INTO JUDGMENT. We live in a profane and vulgar world. Words that were never used “in mixed company” fifty years ago are spewed forth in public places my men and women alike. Children often do not understand why they are not allowed to use certain words at school when both parents use them at home.

I find it particularly unpleasant when people use crude words or expressions in referring to body parts and body functions. I will confess, I do not know where you will go to find this issue addressed, and it is probably not addressed too often from the pulpit. Crude, vulgar language dishonors God and the individual who uses them will have to answer to Him, but the subject here is swearing, which is as serious in God's sight as any other sin (2:10), and will be punished just as severely in God's judgment. God's people, in times of trouble should call on His name in reverence instead of cursing Him, or taking His name in vain. These Jewish readers knew the examples of Job (5:11) and the prophets (5:10).

At this point I am going to repeat a quotation from chapter three:

Vulgarity (Rom. 3:13) is the most obnoxious form of speech. Flattery (3:13b) is the most hypocritical form of speech. Slander (3:13c) is the most deadly form of speech. And profanity (3:14) is the most inexcusable form of speech. There may be temptation for the first three; but there is never a temptation for a person to profane God's name.

It is a characteristic of man to sin by temptation; and it is a characteristic of Satan to sin without temptation; therefore, to use profanity is to sin in similitude to the devil.

III. CHRISTIANS ARE ENCOURAGED TO PRAY, 5:13-18.

A. Occasions for Prayer, 13-14.

(Suffering, Joy, Sickness)

5:13 - SUFFERING. *“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.”* Nowhere in the Bible do we find a health and wealth gospel. Nowhere are we told that once you become a Christian your troubles are over. Unfortunately, a number of radio preachers and tel-evangelists have misled a lot of people with their stories about “seed money,” faith expressed in money given to their particular ministry, or the orphanage they operate in one of the Third World countries. Jesus did not promise peace, He promised a sword. To take up the cross and follow Him is to lay your life on the line for Him. The cross represents death. Wiersbe's brief commentary is salient:

The Bible nowhere promises that Christians will have an easy life, but the Bible does tell us what to do when trials come. Some Christians will be afflicted, that is, go through a trial specifically planned by God. What should they do? Pray! James does not promise that God will remove the affliction, but he does suggest that God will give the grace necessary to endure it.^{clxx}

James believed in prayer. As we have already seen, tradition tells us that he spent so much

time in prayer that his knees became hard and calloused, and that he was called “Old Camel Knees”. God works effectually through prayer, but that prayer must come from a clean heart and a humble spirit. James uses Elijah as the example of the power of prayer; see 1 Kings 17ff. “Like passions” (v. 17) means “with a nature like other men” (see Acts 14:15). It was not Elijah’s natural gifts that made him a great man of prayer; it was his dedication and faith.

5:14 - SICK. *“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.”* In verse 13, the reference was to affliction in general, and the believer’s response to that suffering in trials. “The subject of sickness, however, is so important, since it so often occurs, that a specific direction was desirable. That direction is to call in the aid of others to lead our thoughts, and to aid us in our devotions, because one who is sick is less able to direct his own reflections and to pray for himself than he is in other form of trial. Nothing is said here respecting the degree of sickness, whether it is that which would be fatal if these means were used or not; but the direction pertains to any kind of illness.”^{clxxi}

I stopped by a business some twenty years ago and discovered that a man from a former pastorate was making a business call. This man had tried to stir up opposition to me many years earlier over something I had preached. He had called an independent pastor from another state and asked him to come hear me preach. This preacher shouted “Amen!” to everything I said. If I cleared my throat he said “Amen!” Then, he went to the man’s home and, based on what his wife said, “cut me to pieces.” When one lady heard that he was criticizing me she went to see him and simply told him that she believed God had called me to preach the Gospel and the church had called me to be pastor and she was going to support the pastor. He left the church and two years later he was back - some country did not do what he had predicted they would do - he was not wrong, they were, apparently.

When I talked with him at the local business he began telling me that if you had faith in God you did not have to be sick. My mother was bed-ridden at the time after having had a malignant tumor removed from her brain a few years earlier. She was one of the most godly people I have ever known. In fact, she was one of the most godly people anyone who knew her had ever known. But she was sick. This man was adamant to the point of militance, but within two or three years he and his wife were both battling terminal cancer.

The Greek word for “elders” is the word for “presbyters.” This cannot be a reference to the early apostles, for there would not be enough of them to visit all the people as the church began to grow. Furthermore, instructions like this were designed to have a permanent character, and to be applicable to the church at all times and in all places. Barnes’ notes, though lengthy, are profitable:

The reference, therefore, is doubtless to the ordinary religious teachers of the congregation; the officers of the church entrusted with its spiritual interests. The spirit of the command would embrace those who are pastors, and any others to whom the spiritual interests of the congregation are confided—ruling elders, deacons, etc. If the allusion is to the ordinary officers of the church, it is evident that the cure to be hoped for James 5:15 was not miraculous, but was that to be expected in the use of

appropriate means accompanied by prayer.

It may be added, as worthy of note, that the apostle says they should “call” for the elders of the church; that is, they should send for them. They should not wait for them to hear of their sickness, as they might happen to, but they should cause them to be informed of it, and give them an opportunity of visiting them and praying with them. Nothing is more common than for persons—even members of the church—to be sick a long time, and to presume that their pastor must know all about it; and then they wonder that he does not come to see them, and think hard of him because he does not. A pastor cannot be supposed to know everything; nor can it be presumed that he knows when persons are sick, any more than he can know anything else, unless he is apprized of it; and many hard thoughts, and many suspicions of neglect would be avoided, if, when persons are sick, they would in some way inform their pastor of it. It should always be presumed of a minister of the gospel that he is ready to visit the sick. But how can he go unless he is in some way apprized of the illness of those who need his counsel and his prayers? The sick send for their family physician; why should they presume that their pastor will know of their illness any more than that their physician will?^{clxxii}

ANOINT HIM WITH OIL. The word “anoint” is the common word for “massage”; it is used in Mark 16:1, where the women wanted to prepare the body of Christ for burial. Oil was commonly used as a medicine in James’ day. Physicians often anointed the sick with oil (Luke 10:34). The picture here is of saints not only praying for one another but also using appropriate medication. What are Christians to do when a brother or sister is sick? Pray for them **and** seek medical attention.

There are some who are so convinced that this means that before they pray for a sick person they must apply a drop (or smear) of olive oil to the forehead. A well-meaning Christian shared his testimony about visiting a family during the church visitation one evening. A member of the family was sick and they did not have olive oil with them. When they discovered that there was no olive oil in the home, one of the visitors thought of a solution. He went outside and in a couple of minutes he came back into the room carrying the dip stick from his automobile engine! He anointed the sick person with burnt oil!

Some fanatically resist medication at the risk of their health or even their life or that of their children. This passage does not justify anyone who denies medical care to his children. Paul often traveled with the physician Luke. Jesus is the Great Physician. There are many God-fearing doctors practicing medicine today. Before my by-pass surgery a very godly anesthetist came to my room and had prayer with me. I have been in rooms with patients in Glenwood Medical Center when Dr. Ferguson came by and prayed with a patient before surgery.

In November, 2000, I sat and visited with my cardiologist, Dr. Tommy Causey, after my office visit, and he radiated faith and love for the Lord as he told me about the conference for Christian doctors in San Diego he was attending the end of the week. We spoke of Dr. Tommy Gullatt, his friend and fellow church member and my pulmonologist, who has made a number of

mission trips to Ukraine. He has seen the hand of God on these medical missions.

B. The Power of Prayer, 15.

5:15 - THE PRAYER OF FAITH. *“And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.”* Both healing and forgiveness are promised when God’s children pray, believing. Christians do get sick, as we all know, but some students of the Word see in this verse an implication that the sickness to which James refers is the result of sin (see 1 Cor. 11:30). What should the believers do when there is sickness? They should call the leaders of the church and ask for prayer. “This is not a church ritual to prepare a person for death, because James says that it results in the healing of the person’s body.”^{clxxiii}

THE LORD WILL RAISE HIM UP. We often hear about faith healing. Signs in front of churches and revival tents have for decades announced, “Healing Meeting,” or “Faith Healing.” This gets to be a touchy subject with some people. In the first place, many people have health problems, some really serious. Sooner or later we will all have to deal with health problems. We are concerned for family members and friends who are suffering from cancer or heart disease. In the second place, when some people begin talking about faith healing you never know where they are going with it. This is where you pick up the fanatics, and it is also where you see deception.

Then, am I saying that I do not believe in faith healing? Absolutely not! I believe in faith and I believe in healing. Here is the part I want to emphasize - the Bible says, “The Lord will raise him up.” You see, it is the faith healers that often give me a problem. This whole area is open to deception and many people have been deceived. Numerous “faith healers” have been exposed through the “miracle” of modern science. Mostly, it has been a matter of careful, objective investigation.

When I was growing up in the Mississippi delta we began hearing reports of a revival in Memphis. Huge crowds were filling the big tent and many people were standing outside near “loud speakers” listening to the charismatic young preacher. They came from all over the region to see and hear this modern faith healer. His name was Oral Roberts. My community turned out, praying to see a “deaf mute” (as she was then called) healed. We watched her stand in the line and gradually make her way to the front.

We watched as Oral Roberts performed his magic (speaking now of crowd psychology) on the audience. “In the name of Jesus, I am going to command the demons to come out of this woman and when they come out they are going to be looking for a place to go, so if you do not hold onto the back of the chair in front of you they are going to go into you. But if you are holding onto the back of the chair in front of you, you will have ‘a point of contact’ and they cannot go into you.” I heard him with my own ears! A lot of people grabbed hold of that chair in front of them! They were not taking any chances.

Our friend finally got to Oral Roberts and he read on the card that she was deaf and mute.

He places his hand over her mouth and then over her ears and pronounced her “HEALED!” But she was not healed. Her family watched her for several days, waiting for her to start speaking or hearing. Finally, they wrote to Oral Roberts to tell them she had not been healed. They got a letter back explaining that she may have gotten out of place in line!

I received a call one day from an elderly lady who needed to see me. It was urgent. When I arrived at her home she told me through her tears that she had been diagnosed with cancer and that the doctors wanted to do surgery. She did not want to have the surgery, she wanted me to pray for her. She then told me she had been watching Rex Humbard on television. He was inviting people to send in prayer requests - and of course, the traditional handkerchief. She had sent her handkerchief and she was convinced he would pray over it and return it to her so that she could place it over the effected area and be healed. Just in case, as I recall, she had also called Oral Roberts.

A few months later I received a call while on vacation. This lady was in St. Francis Hospital in Monroe, Louisiana. I got to the hospital around midnight and went to her room where a relative told me they “opened her up and found that the cancer had spread all over her body. All they could do was to closer her up.” It was too late. If she had let them perform the surgery when they wanted to there was a strong possibility that they could have removed the tumor before it spread.

The Lord raises us up. I do not like to talk about the power of faith, it is the power of God. When asked if I believe in the supremacy of grace, I respond that I believe in the supremacy of God and the sufficiency of grace. I believe God heals and I believe He often heals in response to the faith He gives us, just as He responds to the faith He has placed in us when he saves us. It is by grace, through faith, not of works lest any should boast (Eph. 2:8-9).

HE WILL BE FORGIVEN. Forgiveness does not come as a result of sickness and suffering. Some may remember a very popular song recorded by the late Marty Robins, “*My Woman, My Woman, My Wife,*” in which we find the words, “Lord grant her my share of heaven if I have earned any here below.” No one merits Heaven through suffering, sickness, or because she had a sorry husband! God promises forgiveness to those who confess their sins and repent. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

C. The Conditions Under Which Prayers Are Answered, 16-18.

1. Confession of sin.
2. A right relationship with others.
3. Personal righteousness.

5:16 - CONFESS. “*Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*” In this verse, James summarizes the lesson: Christians are to confess their sins and pray for each other. This, however, does not mean that the Christian should confess everything he or she knows to everyone who comes along. They should confess sins committed against each other. The Greek word (*exomologew*)

means to confess, to agree, or in a broader sense, to say (or name) the same thing. We only confess our sins when we are in agreement with God as to the nature, consequences, and seriousness of that specific sin. However, this does not denote a generic, "Forgive me for any sins I may have committed in the past week." We must look upon our sins as God looks upon them. - agree with Him (say the same thing) about the evil and the effects of our sins.

TO ONE ANOTHER. This is God's plan for His people, and there are times when we should confess to one another. There are things we should confess to one another. And there are things which we may need to confess only to God. If you have sinned against another person, confess it to him and ask for forgiveness. However, one had better be careful when he confesses that he has lusted after his neighbor's wife - or daughter. There are things that should be confessed first to God, and then if help is needed the individual should talk with his pastor.

Yes, I did say his pastor. During the Christian era in America people commonly talked with their pastor about problems, even their sins. During the post-Christian era in which we now live, we are told to talk with a counselor, who specializes in one behavior problem or another. You can still talk with your pastor. God calls pastors to tend His sheep, which includes feeding His sheep and ministering to their needs. He calls them and gives them His Spirit to guide them and to empower them for His service. As a general rule, He also calls them to prepare themselves - or better yet, let Him prepare them - for that service. Yes that means formal training when and where it is possible. God calls and He equips us for service, but just as Samuel set up schools for ministerial students (sons of the prophets), He has called godly, dedicated teachers to help equip us for that service. He also provides mature, experienced pastors and other ministers to help provide practical assistance.

Why, some will ask, if God calls you "Do you have to go off to one of those **cemeteries** to make a preacher?" Well, only one who had been off to those seminaries can tell you why he needed to go. When as a freshman at Mississippi College, standing in line with James Sadler of Bentonia, Mississippi, I had an opportunity to listen to our faculty advisor, Dr. E. R. Pinson, as he talked with other students. Dr. Pinson seemed serious, dry, almost humorless (which was far from the case). Neither Sadler nor I knew what the Lord had in store for us. We would go on to become roommates, but that would be later. The Lord had some lessons for us right there that day. When he learned that Sadler was enrolling as a ministerial student he asked him his plans. "I want to go to summer school and graduate in three years and then go on to seminary," he said. Dr. Pinson asked,

"Mr Sadler, how old are you?"

"Eighteen."

"Son, you go home and help your daddy plow."

My time had come, and I stood before Dr. Pinson, not knowing how much I would come to love that man. He greeted me and asked what I was doing there, or something to that effect. I told him that the Lord had called me to preach and that he had led me to Mississippi College. My father in the ministry, M. C. Waldrup and his gracious wife, Connie, had taken me down for homecoming the year before. There was never any other school I considered. So far, I am on top of things. I know where I am going, or so I think. I announce that I want to major in Bible.

“Mr. Sanders, do you plan to go to seminary?”

“I don’t know, I would like to but I don’t know if I can afford it.”

“If God has called you. He will provide a way.”

“Yes Sir.”

“Now, if you are going to seminary, you will be taking some of the same classes you would take if you majored in Bible here, and they will be on a deeper level. I would recommend that you major in something else and minor in Bible here.”

I got a double major. Including thirty-three hours of Bible at Mississippi College, a lot of it under Dr. Pinson. Some found him boring, but the word was that his classes would better prepare you for seminary. I never found a Bible class boring! I called Dr. Pinson to wish him a happy birthday ninety-second birthday - and was blessed once again by this godly, brilliant man. But I double majored at Mississippi College.

A year after my last class under Dr. Pinson I was sitting in a classroom at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, totally amazed at all the fields of study I had never even heard of before. I also learned that if I were ever to be able to read and understand some of the outstanding books produced by theologians, I had to be equipped to read them critically. I was in a new world of homiletics, hermeneutics, archaeology, systematic theology, intensives in various books of the Bible, history of Christianity, Greek and Hebrew - ninety-eight hours that, according to an actual survey, was more demanding than Tulane medical school. And that was just for the Masters.

I was amused by comments I would hear time and time again: “I hear you are going to school to make a preacher.” Or, “I’ll bet you really know the Bible.” I was in the ministry because God called me as a thirteen year boy one night at First Baptist Church, Marks, Mississippi as I listened to missionary James Belote. No seminary can make you a preacher of the Gospel, it can only help prepare you for the work. And, how could I explain that I had spent three long years learning how to study the Bible? Would anyone ever believe that I spent so much time discovering fields of study I had never even heard of when I left home?

TRESPASSES. The word James uses (*hamartia*) denotes missing the mark. An archer whose arrow falls short of the target has missed the mark. He has not deliberately missed the target, but for some reason he has missed it. He lacked strength, the bow was weak, the arrow bent, or the wind was blowing and he did not adjust for it. He simply missed the mark. In David’s great penitential psalm, Psalm 51, he cried out to God for forgiveness for sins (missing the mark), for transgressions (stepping across the line with his eyes wide open), and iniquities (denoting warped or twisted - if you continue to miss the mark and to step across the line, you will progress to the point that your life is twisted and warped by those sins).

FERVENT PRAYER. “James continues, “...The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” The Greek words denote an *energetic supplication*. Such a prayer is **suggested, directed, and energized by the Holy Spirit**. I once heard R. G. Lee comment on praying about some matter with a sense of great urgency. He added, “That wasn’t one of those Polly wants a cracker prayers” ! The man of whom James speaks is exactly the opposite of the doubtful minded

man of 1:6.

He is intense, sincere, and one who has been “energized” by the Holy Spirit for a special task (Hammond). Although the righteous man’s prayer is always heard, the particular context suggests that he prays for the healing of another Christian, and that because of the earnest character of his Christian life, his prayer will be answered. Here is a man who puts faith into action (2:24).^{clxxiv}

The prayer that starts in Heaven ends up in Heaven - **suggested, directed, and energized by the Holy Spirit**. When we pray under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in the energy of the Holy Spirit, we may pray with confidence that God will hear our prayers and take action that will accomplish His purpose in us. “When such a power of prayer is granted, faith should be immediately called into exercise, that the blessing may be given: the spirit of prayer is the proof that the power of God is present to heal. Long prayers give no particular evidence of Divine inspiration.”^{clxxv} It was an axiom among the ancient Jews that the prayers of the righteous were short, and there are many examples in the Old Testament. It is true that in the New Testament we find Jesus praying all night, or well into the night. However, recorded prayers are never long. This does not preclude lengthy prayers, but it does not demand that effective, fervent prayer be long, or emotional.

I have a confession. When I found myself in need of physical healing after medical errors had in treatment of pain in one area of my left foot had me in intense pain with both feet, I often prayed as fervently as I knew how for God to heal me. We prefer our testimonies about prayer to conclude with the assurance that I prayed for healing, God heard me, and I was healed. All prayer experiences are not like that, but we do not seem to want to hear anyone say, “I asked God to heal me, but I was not healed. Instead, God gave me the grace to bear up under the suffering and He supplied my needs.” This is not the kind of testimonies one hears on some of the more popular television ministries. The televangelist, having received “a word of knowledge”, prays for someone in the viewing audience who is having knee trouble, and then announces’ “God has healed this person.”

What do you do when you pray as fervently as you know how, and nothing happens? What happens when you pray as fervently as you can and the next morning the situation is worse? Before you let anyone tell you that cannot happen, let me assure you that it not only can, it happened to me. Why? God may have been saying “No” rather than “Yes.” I doubt that He was saying, “Maybe,” but He may well have been saying, “All in My time.” What was the problem? Well, I concluded that I may have been quoting this verse to God in order, at least subconsciously, to - for want of a better expression - paint Him into a corner with Scripture to show Him that He must grant what I requested. Jesus said that if we need anything we are to ask it in His name and He will give it to us (John 15:7). I reminded the Lord of that promise and then I made my request. The next morning the pain was worse. I read Psalm 86:1-7 and reminded the Lord that he promised to hear the prayers of His people. Nothing. I quoted this verse over and over. It got worse. What lessons did I learn from my experience?

1. Man must not put God to the test. “Jesus said to him, ‘On the other hand, it is written, ‘YOU

SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST” (Matt. 4:7).

2. While God did not enable me to get up and walk, He was with me every step of the way.
3. His grace is sufficient.
4. God does provide healing in many ways.
5. His miraculous daily attention to my needs is a marvelous and glorious thing.
6. The Lord often uses others to help us.
7. I may never have learned these lessons If God had completely healed me the first time I tried the fervency test on Him.
8. Never stop praying. When I was able to stand to preach after 26 years, I recalled the times I had prayed, “Lord, lift me up and let me stand,” and knew I had experienced a miracle.

D. An Illustration of the Power of Prayer, 5:17-18.

5:17 - ELIJAH. *“Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.”* The devout Jew was well aware of Elijah, who, though a non-writing prophet, is the representative prophet. As Moses was to the Law, so was Elijah to the Prophets. Who was it who appeared with Jesus at the time of His Transfiguration? Moses (Jesus fulfills the Law) and Elijah (Jesus fulfills Prophecy). Elijah is presented as he was, a sinner saved by the grace, a man totally sold out to God, yet a man with the same nature (passions in the KJV) as ours. Elijah “prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.” The Jewish readers knew the story (1 Kings 17).

To honor Elijah for his faithfulness the Lord took him home to glory without his having to experience physical death in order to get out of this world. The only other person who was taken to Heaven without having to die was Enoch, who “walked with God and was not, for God took him.” In pagan religions such men would have been worshiped as gods, but not in Christianity. As great as Elijah - or as powerfully as God used him - he was still a man with the same nature as ours. The point is that we pray to the same God and He is as accessible to us as he was to Elijah. Commentaries using the KJV have to explain the word “passions” (nature). Barnes, for example, writes:

This does not mean that Elijah was passionate in the sense in which that word is now commonly used; that is, that he was excitable or irritable, or that he was the victim of the same corrupt passions and propensities to which other men are subject; but that he was like affected; that he was capable of suffering the same things, or being affected in the same manner. In other words, he was a mere man, subject to the same weaknesses and infirmities as other men.^{clxxvi}

Clarke agrees, points out that the Greek word

signifies of the same constitution, a human being just as ourselves are. See the same phrase and its explanation in Acts 14:15, and the note there. There was some reason

to apprehend that because Elijah was translated, that therefore he was more than human, and if so, his example could be no pattern for us; and as the design of St. James was to excite men to pray, expecting the Divine interference whenever that should be necessary, therefore he tells them that Elijah was a man like themselves, of the same constitution, liable to the same accidents, and needing the same supports.^{clxxvii}

I could have simply disregarded the KJV and used the NAS, “nature” and most everyone would have understood it. Why then should I take the time and space to deal with this? I am glad you asked! When I was thirty-six years old I went to a doctor who was supposed to be a foot specialist. I learned later that I had a pinched nerve between two metatarsal joints in my left foot. The metatarsal bars and molds he attached to my shoes caused damage to both feet. When I told him that those things hurt so badly that I could not walk on them, he insisted that if I would stay with it I would adjust to them. I tried, not knowing that the bars were too far forward, too thick, and set at the wrong angle, creating a leverage which used my weight against my feet. I was almost totally incapacitated. In time two orthopedists would confirm the fact that more than one person made errors that nearly destroyed my feet.

One concerned lady told me that she was praying for me and she knew that other members of the church were praying for me. However, Katherine Kulhman was in Houston and if I would just go over there and let her pray for me I would be healed. I assured her that I was appreciative of all the prayers, but I added, “However, if you have faith in God, I would trust your prayers just as much as I would those of Katherine Kulhman.”

Radio and television faith-healers have created the idea among many people that there are ordinary Christians and then there are the super-saints. They parade famous people before the camera or microphones to give their testimonies and then encouraged people who needed healing to call or write to them. Some implied that a check would get better results. Some asked people to send in a handkerchief which would be blessed and then returned so that the person could lay it over the problem area to cause the healing to take place. That is an occult practice, but thousands of Christians fell for it. If you tried to warn those deceived believers they looked on you as the enemy of God, a heretic, one in league with the devil. I told one that if I thought a handkerchief would help me a little, I would send a bed sheet! Let me stress that I believe in “faith healing” - it is the professional “faith healer” that disturbs me.

It is sad that so many will reject the promises God has made to every believer and assume that the promises of Scripture are made only to certain super-saints. Not so, says James. We are all of the same nature and every child of God has access to Him. I have often wondered if there are not some sick or troubled people who are walking in the flesh, who are not willing to walk with the Lord in the spirit, but when trouble comes they opt for a sort of **faith interlude with God** through someone else whom they see as living the holy life they themselves have no intention of living for very long.

Years ago, my grandfather was at our house when a violent thunderstorm hit. He had driven

into Tupelo, Mississippi after one of the most deadly tornadoes in the history of America had swept through that town, reportedly killing more people than any other tornado in the history of America. Because of my grandfather's unusual fear of storms, my father finally dug a rather large storm house, or pit, and concreted it with a concrete slab. I drove up to visit my parents on one stormy night and found cars parked all around the place. I walked up to the door and saw my father sitting in his favorite chair watching television. I asked him what was going on and he said, "the whole neighborhood is down there in the storm pit."

The thunderstorm to which I refer happened before the storm pit was built. He walked from door to window, looking for a funnel cloud. After the storm he realized that we were all concerned about him. He looked at my younger brother and said, "Son, I lived a Christian life there for a while, and if I had to, I could live it the rest of the night." He had a way of expressing in humor what he viewed as a reality with many others.

Most believers believe in "saying prayers" or praying, but many believers do not seem to really understand that God's invitation to prayer is for every believer. We are invited to go to God in prayer. Through Jeremiah, God says, "Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know" (Jer. 33:3). Through Isaiah, He assures us, "It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear" (Isaiah 65:34). Jesus said, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15:7).

5:18 - HE PRAYED. *"And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit."* In 1 Kings 18:42, we read, "...But Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he crouched down on the earth and put his face between his knees." We are not told in that verse that Elijah prayed, but the Holy Spirit inspired James to write that he prayed. In response to his prayer God sent rain and the earth once again produced its fruit after a three year drought.

Some questions come to mind. Does "he prayed again" mean that Elijah had not prayed between since the beginning of the drought? Of course not. Next question: If Elijah had prayed for rain one year earlier would the rain have come? Of course not. God had expressed His purpose and it would be fulfilled. Next question: If God was about to end the drought why did Elijah have to pray? That brings us back to statement I made earlier: The prayer that reaches Heaven is the prayer that begins in Heaven. In other words, if we are walking in the spirit and not in the flesh the Holy Spirit will so direct our prayer that we will be praying about that which God wants us to bring before Him. Failure to believe that is to ensure failure in prayer.

The Lord let Elijah know when to pray for rain and then acted in response to his prayer. The key Person in this prayer is God, not Elijah. The primary purpose in prayer is not for us to bend the will of God to suit our purpose, but for God to mold and develop us according to His purpose. Prayer takes on new meaning when we come to understand that the primary purpose in our communication with our heavenly Father is not for us to get what we want from Him, but to be sure He gets what He wants from us. I know that - I just wrote it. Then why do I keep forgetting it when I have a pressing need? "Father, forgive me for I have sinned - again."

IV. CHRISTIANS WHO HAVE SINNED ARE URGED TO REPENT, 5:19-20.

A. Backsliders Have Strayed From the Truth, 5:19.

5:19 - IF ANYONE ...WANDERS. *“Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back...”* If anyone wanders from the truth - and someone will - Christians are in a unique position to help reclaim them. “If” anyone wanders? Everyone is at risk at all times, and whether we wander for only a short time or for many years, it is serious. It is sin, and it is beyond the power of the wanderer to return on his own. He may think he returns on his own, but no one can find God on his own, and once he has strayed he can only be restored when he repents and is forgiven. It is only through the convicting power and presence of the Holy Spirit that he knows he must repent. God then does the restoring.

I once preached a series of messages on Egypt, the Wilderness, and Canaan. Summarizing that series, Egypt represents death or bondage; the Wilderness represents that area between where the Israelites were when they were in bondage and the place God had prepared for them (their inheritance); and Canaan is the Land of Promise (“where my possessions lie”). It took a mighty act of God to deliver the Israelites from Egypt (bondage, death) - it took the parting of the Red Sea. It still takes a mighty act of God to deliver a person who is dead in sin - it took the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God did not deliver Israel from Egypt for them to wander in the wilderness for forty years, He delivered them to take them into Canaan where they could possess their possessions. He does not deliver us from death so that we might wander in the wilderness (walk in the flesh), He delivers us from the bondage of sin (death) so that we might enter our Canaan and possess our possessions (walk in the spirit). Sadly, many Christians, people who have been delivered from death by a mighty act of God, refuse to enter their Canaan and possess their possessions. They elect to wander in the wilderness of sin. Like the wanderers in that ancient wilderness, backsliders gripe, fuss, complain about their leaders, and plot against their ministers - all while boasting that God has delivered them from death. Wilderness believers seem to spend more time with their minds on Egypt than on Canaan. Some of those who are walking in the flesh look, sound, and even smell like they are still in Egypt. Some wilderness believers may be in church every Sunday while others stay home and watch Charles Stanley or James Kennedy on TV. It could be a lot worse, they could be watching one of those trauma-entertainer-psych types. Of course, if their own pastor could preach like Charles Stanley they would never miss a service! Other wilderness believers have lapsed into carnal habits and they need to be delivered from those habits as well as the sin that underlies them.

Here is the point: you can no more deliver yourself from the wilderness than you can deliver yourself from Egypt. It took a mighty act of God (parting the waters of the Red Sea) to deliver them from Egypt, and it took a mighty act of God to deliver the people from the wilderness (parting the waters of the Jordan River). The lost person cannot save himself and the backslider cannot restore himself. God does the saving and God does the restoring. Blessed be the name of the Lord!

It is God's plan to use Christians to reach those who are dead in sin with the Gospel of eternal life. That is why Jesus gave us the Great Commission. It is God's purpose to use Christians to take to the message of repentance and restoration to Christians who have wandered.

FROM THE TRUTH. Backsliders are people who have embraced Jesus Christ as Savior and then wandered "from the truth." What exactly does that mean? One may wander *practically* through sin, or he may wander *theologically* through false doctrines. He may be guilty of practical heresy, or he may be guilty of theological heresy. In either case the wanderer needs to be restored, and God has determined that He will use the faithful to help reclaim and restore the unfaithful.

We are in no danger of placing too much emphasis on sound doctrine. Sound doctrine simply means embracing and applying the truth of God. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and the Gospel is the message of truth. Jesus Himself taught, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32, NKJV). We are set free from death by the truth, and we are set free from false doctrine by the truth - by the sound doctrine of the Word of God.

It is not easy to restore one who has wandered away from the truth, either in false doctrine, or in sin and rebellion against God. Until the Holy Spirit brings that person under conviction of his sin, he may be very belligerent and antagonistic toward the one who tries to bring him back to God where he may enjoy the Christ life to its fullest (possess his possessions). Only when God delivers him from the wilderness will he ever appreciate the abundance of the blessing that await those who walk with the Lord.

B. We Can Help Reach the Lost for Christ, 5:20.

20 - TURNS A SINNER FROM THE ERROR. *"Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins."* I am going to take a position here that leaves me at odds with most commentaries I have read. In verse 19, we see that God uses Christians to reclaim those who have "wandered from the truth." Here, we see that it is God's purpose to use His children to bring the lost to Him for His salvation. "A Christian's love and concern for someone else can bring that person to the place where he will see that Christ's death on the cross covers his sins before God. The possibility that a Christian can have a part in such a tremendous task so excited James that he repeated himself (see 5:19)" [NCWB]. If we examine both verses, it is obvious that in verse 19 the individual James has in mind is a backslider. Here, the sinner is a lost person, as "save a soul from death" would demand. Many commentaries, however, see in both verses the restoration of the backslider to fellowship with the Lord: "Wandering ones need to be brought back to the fold. James referred here not to evangelism but to restoration. Revival, not redemption, is in view."^{clxxviii}

Let him duly consider, for his encouragement, that he who is the instrument of converting a sinner shall save a soul from eternal death, and a body from ruin, and shall hide a multitude of sins; for in being the means of his conversion we bring him back to God, who, in his infinite mercy, hides or blots out the numerous sins which

he had committed during the time of his backsliding.^{clxxix}

In the John MacArthur Study Bible the foot notes state that the death to which James refers is eternal death, the death of the soul. In fact, John MacArthur writes, “A person who wanders from the truth puts his soul in jeopardy. The ‘death’ in view is not physical death, but eternal death—eternal separation of the soul from God and eternal punishment of the soul in hell.”^{clxxx} Many writers have no problem with this because they believe it is possible for a Christian to backslide to the point that he can lose his salvation. Based on the clear claims of Scripture, and even the tense and construction used in the Greek in other passages, I hold that when we are saved by grace, through faith, you are regenerated and adopted forever into the family of God. The Scripture is clear:

And I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one (John 10:28-30).

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to *obtain* an inheritance *which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven* for you, who are **protected by the power of God** through faith for a salvation **ready to be revealed in the last time** (1 Peter 1:3-5, emphasis added).

While there may never be agreement as to whether or not James has in mind the backslider in both verses 19-20, or to a lost person in verse 20, there is one thing on which we can agree, and that is that the Christian is under a divine mandate to actively seek the salvation of the lost person and the restoration of the backslider.

CONCLUSION

The Epistle of James is both deeply theological and intensely practical. As stated in the Introduction, “The major challenge of the Epistle of James is not in the interpretation of it, but in the application of it.” God’s people are to be doers of the Word and not hearers only. The following verses provide a fitting conclusion to this magnificent epistle:

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the

testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (James 1:2-5).

In Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow (1:17).

But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves (1:22).

Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world (1:27).

Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself, (2:17).

Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. (3:13).

Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded (4:7-8).

Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you, (4:10).

My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins (5:19-20).

END NOTES

-
- i. Wiersbe, Warren, QuickVerse Bible Program, Version 6, Parsons Technology, 1999.
 - ii. Holman Bible Dictionary (HBD), QuickVerse.
 - iii. Believer's Study Bible (BSB), QuickVerse.
 - iv. BSB.
 - v. Wiersbe.
 - vi. Wiersbe.

 - vii. BSB
 - viii. BSB
 - ix. Wiersbe
 - x. Bible Knowledge Commentary (BKC), QuickVerse, Parsons Technology, 1999

 - xi. New Commentary on the Whole Bible (NCWB), QuickVerse, Parsons, 1999
 - xii. Bible Illustrator (BI), QuickVerse, Parsons Technology, 1999
 - xiii. BKC
 - xiv. BI
 - xv. Aikman, David, ("Rescue to the Christians," *The American Spectator*, July, 1996, p 22
 - xvi. IBID, p. 32
 - xvii. IBID, p. 23
 - xviii. Adam Clarke's Commentary on the New Testament, QuickVerse
 - xix. Wiersbe
 - xx. Robertson, A. T., Word Pictures in the New Testament, QuickVerse, Vol. 6, 1999

xxi.Adam Clarke's Commentary on the New Testament (CLARKE), QuickVerse, Vol. 6, 1999

xxii.BI

xxiii.NCWB

xxiv.BI

xxv.Wiersbe

xxvi.Word Pictures in the NT

xxvii.Ryrie Study Bible Notes (RSB), QuickVerse, Parsons, Vol. 6, 1999

xxviii.Wiersbe

xxix.Wiersbe

xxx.RSB

xxxi.RSB

xxxii.Matthew Henry's Condensed Commentary on the Bible (MH), QuickVerse, Vol 6, 1999

xxxiii.The Preacher's Homiletic Commentary, Vol 29, Baker House, 1974, pp. 648, p. 521

xxxiv.IBID, 522

xxxv.MH

xxxvi.Wiersbe

xxxvii.MH

xxxviii.Wiersbe

xxxix.RSB

xl.Wiersbe

xli.IBID

xlii.MH

xliii.IBID

xliv.BI

xlv.BI

xlvi.MH

xlvii.BI

xlviii.BSB

xlix.Sowell, Thomas, *Vision of the Anointed*, BasicBooks, 1955, pp 305, p. 42

l.IBID, p. 44

li.IBID, p. 44

lii.IBID, p. 44.

liii.IBID. p. 44

liv.RSB

lv.BI

lvi.RSB

lvii.BI

lviii.Smith, F. LaGard, *The Devil's Advocate*, Marcon, 1996, pp 311, p. 59

lix.IBID, p. 60

lx.IBID, p. 60

lxi.IBID, p. 60

lxii.BI

lxiii.Gallagher, Maggie, *The Abolition of Marriage*, Regnery, 1996, pp 300, pp. 3-4

lxiv.IBID, p. 5

lxv.Williams, Walter, *National Liberty Journal*, (July, 1996, Vol. 25, No. 7, p. 9

lxvi.IBID, p. 9

lxvii.IBID, p. 9

lxviii.MH

lxix.Wiersbe

lxx.Pickell, Charles N, *Works Count, Too*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1960, p. 12

lxxi.NCWB

lxxii.RSB

lxxiii.BI

lxxiv.BKC

lxxv.Wiersbe

lxxvi.RSB

lxxvii.NCWB

lxxviii.CLARKE

lxxix.NCWB

lxxx.Wiersbe

lxxxi.IBID

lxxxii.MH

lxxxiii.BKC

lxxxiv.BKC

lxxxv.NCWB

lxxxvi.RSB

lxxxvii.Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, QuickVerse, Parsons, Vol. 6, 1999

lxxxviii.IBID

lxxxix.NCWB

xc.CLARKE

xcı.Wıersbe

xcıı.BARNES

xcııı.BKC

xcıv.NCWB

xcv.NCWB

xcvi.CLARKE

xcvıı.BI

xcvııı.McBeth, J. P., *An Exegetical and Practical Commentary on Romans*, Hennington Publishing Company, 1937, pp 250, p. 109

xcıx.CLARKE

c.RSB

cı.NCWB

cıı.BSB

cııı.Disciple's Study Bible Notes (DSB), QuickVerse, Parsons, Version 6, 1999

cıv.BARNES

cıv.NCWB

cıvı.IBID

cıvıı.CLARKE

cıvııı.NCWB

cıx.NCWB

cıx.Wıersbe

cıxı.BARNES

cxii.NCWB

cxiii.Richardson, Kurt A., *James*, The New American Commentary (NAC), Broadman and Holman, Nashville, 1997, pp 272, p. 172

cxiv.CLARKE

cxv.Wiersbe

cxvi.Wiersbe

cxvii.NCWB

cxviii.Wiersbe

cxix.NCWB

cxx.BKC

cxxi.Rossie, Rossie, Monroe, LA “News-Star,” August 25, 2000

cxxii.Proctor, William, *The Gospel According to the New York Times*, Broadman & Holman, Nashville, 2000, pp. 308, p. 75

cxxiii.DSB

cxxiv.Sutton, Jerry, *The Baptist Reformation*, Broadman and Holman, Nashville, 2000, 402

cxxv.IBID, p. 381

cxxvi.French, Tommy, Sermon, *Changing Lives in Changing Times*, the President’s Address delivered to the Louisiana Baptist Convention, Monday, November 13, 2000

cxxvii.CLARKE

cxxviii.BARNES

cxxix.NAC, p. 179

cxix.NCWB

cxixi.BKC

cxixii.NAC, p. 180

cxxxiii.Wiersbe

cxxxiv.CLARKE

cxxxv.CLARKE

cxxxvi.BARNES

cxxxvii.BARNES

cxxxviii.NCWB

cxxxix.BI

cxl.BI

cxli.BI

cxlii.Wiersbe

cxliii.BKC

cxliv.BKC

cxlv.Wiersbe

cxlvi.BKC

cxlvii.BKC

cxlviii.BKC

cxlix.McGhee, Robert S., *The Search for Significance*, Ralpa, 1990, pp 187, p. 29

cl.BI

cli.BI

clii.Wiersbe

cliii.Wiersbe

cliv.BI

clv.NCWB

clvi.CLARKE

clvii.BARNES

clviii.NCWB

clix.BKC

clx.BKC

clxi.Wiersbe

clxii.NCWB

clxiii.NCWB

clxiv.BKC

clxv.CLARKE

clxvi.CLARKE

clxvii.CLARKE

clxviii.RSB

clxix.NCWB

clxx.Wiersbe

clxxi.BARNES

clxxii.BARNES

clxxiii.Wiersbe

clxxiv.NCWB

clxxv.CLARKE

clxxvi.BARNES

clxxvii.CLARKE

clxxviii.BKC

clxxix.CLARKE

clxxx.JOHN MAC ARTHUR STUDY BIBLE NOTES, Word.

Copyright© 2005
Johnny L. Sanders
All Rights Reserved