

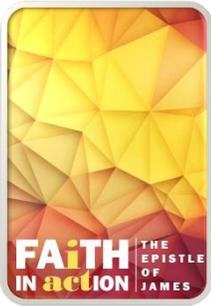
Adult Workbook

Woodlands Church of Christ
Fall, 2021

Don Hooton

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Lesson	Date	Lesson Title	Scripture
1.	9/7	Introduction to James and his Epistle	1:1
2.	9/21	Faith and trials	1:2-11
3.	10/5	Faith and its rewards	1:12-18
4.	10/12	Faith and the Word	1:19-28
5.	10/19	Faith and the royal law	2:1-13
6.	10/26	Faith and works	2:14-26
7.	11/2	Faith and the tongue	3:1-12
8.	11/9	Faith and conduct	3:13-18
9.	11/30	Faith against worldliness	4:1-10
10.	12/7	Faith and the future	4:11-17
11.	12/14	Faith and wealth	5:1-6
12.	12/14	Faith, patience and prayer	5:7-20



Lesson 1

INTRODUCTION

The Epistle of James is the first in a group of epistles customarily called General Epistles, which includes James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude. They are designated as general or “catholic” epistles in the sense that they are universal, not being addressed to any particular individual or church, but to the church as a whole.

| 3

The Setting. It is clear from the letter by James that the early church was experiencing significant problems: divisiveness (1:19-20,26; 4:1), intolerance and favoritism (2:1-7), a uncharitable heart (2:15-16), a complaining and criticizing spirit (4:11; 5:9-11), and the worldly pursuit of wealth and status (5:1-6). He will ultimately tell everyone who wants this world and the kingdom too are nothing more than doubleminded people (4:4; 1:8).

Authorship: There is no question that James wrote the Epistle of James, but which James was the author? Some find at least six men by the name of James in the New Testament. I believe that you can find three who are clearly identified:

1. **James, the brother of Jude** (Jude 1).
2. **James, the father of Judas, not Iscariot** (Acts 1:12)
3. **James, the son of Alphaeus, called “James the less”** (see Mark 3:18, 15:40). He is mentioned in the list of apostles, but very little is known concerning him.
4. **James, the brother of John and one of the sons of Zebedee.** These two men were called “sons of thunder” by our Lord (see Mark 3:17). That he was slain by Herod who at the same time put Simon Peter into prison (see Acts 12:1-2) likely excludes him.
5. **James, the Lord’s brother.** He was a son of Mary and of Joseph, which made him a half brother of the Lord Jesus. In Matthew 13:55 we read: “Is not this the carpenter’s son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?” In the beginning, the Lord’s brethren did not believe in Him at all, but the time came when James became head of the church at Jerusalem. This is equally affirmed in the many references to an influential James in Jerusalem in the writings of Paul (1Cor 9:5, 14; Gal 1:15-2:12).

In Acts 15, this latter James is one of the leaders who has presided over that gathering in Jerusalem. He made the summation and brought the council to a decision under the leading of the Holy Spirit. I believe it was this James whom Paul referred to in Galatians 2:9, “And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.” This James, the Lord’s brother, is the man whom we believe to be the author of this epistle.

Date of Writing: c. A.D. 45–50. There have been those who have said that James wrote his epistle to combat the teachings of Paul; they argue that James emphasizes works while Paul emphasizes faith. However, the earliest of Paul’s epistles, 1 Thessalonians, was written about A.D. 52–56. Therefore, *even Paul’s first epistle was not written until after the Epistle of James*, which was the first book of the New Testament to be written.

The Key Theme: The following are what I consider to be the two key verses of this epistle. “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1:22). And “is not faith without works is dead?” (James 2:20). It is not that James is trying to establish a doctrine – or a teaching. It is the fulfillment of such an idea of living for Christ that he affirms. And from that, James shows that justification by **faith is demonstrated by works**; it must be poured into the test tube of works (ch. 1–2), of words (ch. 3), of worldliness (ch. 4), with his start a warning to the rich (ch. 5). In other words, faith in action is the way a Christian lives – and ultimately like Abraham – will be justified. But he builds those ideas around the themes of:

1. Suffering (1:12-15). In this is the matter of personal character development to make us complete. While the wicked do suffer (Prov 10:1-6) and his friends do affirm the same (Job 4:7-8), Job has shown that life is not simple and neat and that the righteous do suffer. Even Daniel and his friends did (Daniel 2-5). James will show that in suffering, we are purified and proved (1:12).
2. Christ (5:9; 2:8). Fill in the blank:
 - a. Declares himself a “_____ of God and the _____ Jesus _____” (1:1).
 - b. Says that the _____ gives (1:7).
 - c. Described “our” _____ as _____ (2:1).
 - d. We praise our _____ and Father (3:9).
 - e. Humble ourselves before the _____ (4:10).
 - f. Be concerned about the _____ will (4:11).
 - g. Serve the “_____” (5:4).
 - h. Says that the _____ will return (5:7) and that His coming is _____ (5:9).
 - i. Prophets spoke in the _____ of the _____ (5:10).
 - j. The _____ is full of _____ and _____ (5:11).
 - k. We should pray in the name of the _____ (5:14).

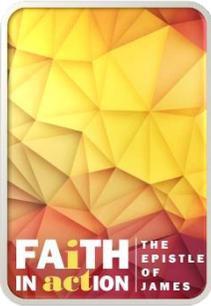
The Message of the Book: The Epistle of James deals with the very practical, but he will not get away from the subject of faith. James was evidently a very practical individual. Tradition says that he was given the name “Old Camel Knees” because he spent so much time in prayer.

Because the book deals with the most practical expression of the ethics of Christianity, the epistle has often been called the Christian’s “Book of Proverbs.” Of course, it does not replace the wisdom of the book in the Old Testament since such divine wisdom is timeless. Yet, it is still true that both emphasize the practical.

In addition to the book of Proverbs, the book has been compared to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Just as the book of Proverbs focuses almost entirely on the life and lifestyle of the one who would follow Yahweh, the Sermon on the Mount focuses on the life and lifestyle (not so much the collective assignments of a church). Notice the parallels:

1. Rejoice in Trials (1:2; Matt 5:12)
2. Be Perfect or Complete (1:4; Matt 5:48)
3. Ask God the perfect Giver (1:5; Matt 7:7)
4. Testing and its Reward for Believers (1:12; Matt 24:13)
5. Don’t be Angry (1:20; Matt 5:22)
6. Faith Works (2:14; Matt 7:16-19)
7. Blessed are the Poor (2:5; Luke 6:20)
8. Warning to the Rich (2:6-7; Matt 19:23-24)
9. Don’t Slander (4:11; Matt 5:22)
10. Don’t Judge (4:12; Matt 7:1)

The book also uses Old Testament heroes and heroines of faith: Abraham, Rahab and Job. He also refers to Old Testament Scripture. He stated that it “says” (4:5), quotes it (4:6), and finds in it the fulfilment of Christian living (2:8, 11, 23).



Lesson 2

Faith and trials

After his brief introduction, James wastes no time to get to the practical living applications he will make. He begins with two sweeping statements that show a rich, Jewish understanding of life under the sun with God. First, he will address the question of trials and difficulties (1:2-8) and how with prayer and wisdom, people of faith can endure. And in the second (1:9-11),

he will address the question of wealth and want and the hardships it creates.

While the tempter is not mentioned by name in these paragraphs, James would have agreed with Jesus that Satan was the source of hardships. The accuser or opposer as he is called (c.f. Jb 1-2, Ze 3) will become openly hostile in the age of Jesus who will be the “strong man” who has gained control of the house without legal rights (c.f. Mk 3:22-30, esp 27). Jesus says he came to bind the strong man (that is, Satan) in order that he himself, as the stronger man (cf. Mk 1:7), might plunder Satan’s house. This is Jesus’s own explanation of the events we encounter in Mark 1–3. And it is the background of James’ words here. While Satan is the inciter to our sin and the father of lies, he masquerades as the good (c.f. 2Co 11:14) and aims to bring disorder and every evil thing – in contrast to the Father of lights (Jm 1:17).

The point James will develop in the balance of things is that while God loves and forgives us, he also allows us to mature and to grow. Whether the road seem easy – or very hard – it is the path that faith will journey. If we maintain a single-hearted devotion, James assures, we will find our way.

About trials (1:1-8). The first thing James says is that testing should be received with joy because it results with steadfastness (1-2). And with it, wisdom will be needed.

The people he addresses is “My brothers.” With reference to the audience of the letter (lesson 1), it will be shown that while he speaks of Jewish things (i.e. the *synagogues* of chapter 2), he is seeing a multi-racial presence of believers in the churches he would have addressed (c.f. Ga 3:28ff, Ro 9:3), even as Jesus did (c.f. Mt 23:8; Mk 3:35; Lk 22:32).

“All” joy is translated elsewhere as “pure” joy. Just as Paul prayed that Colossae would be filled with “all” spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Col 1:9-11), James wants the same complete and pure joy for Christians. Trials can bring that. Christians “meet” or “encounter” trials in that journey which suggests they are unwelcome or unsought. So, James would not encourage us to throw ourselves head long into trials what are *various*, but he encouraged them to remain steadfast.

Christians “meet” or “encounter” trials or testing just as the man helped by the Good Samaritan “fell into the hands of” robbers (Lk 10:30). Although the KJV translates this as temptations, the word is typically neutral as to its moral quality. Instead, it is a “trying of your faith” (KJV) that proves more often the resolve of the subject upon which it is being exercised. While Satan is likened to an attacker (or pirate, c.f. Mt 4:3; 1Cor 10:13; 1Ti 6:9) and the one tempting one in a trial, trials are the generic reality of experience for all humans, even Jesus (c.f. Hb 4:14-16; c.f. Lk 6:22).

JAMES 1:2-11

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,
3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;

8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

9 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,
10 and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.

11 For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

As James notes, there is a purpose that will bring its “full effect” (ESV) in these trials. First, they “produce” Steadfastness” or “endurance.” This highly prized trait that manifests itself in different situations likewise should compel us on, James says, to the full effect of maturity that shows the believer to be both “perfect and complete.” This “perfection” is a word that suggests no deficiencies in character. The second word means “whole” or even “single-minded.” And it should be noted that the reason for the tests will reveal our connection to the character of God and that it is not some unachievable high standard but rather, a stable relationship of a complete God with a person who loyalty and devotion to Him is equally complete.

Then, comes wisdom that God will give – even Jesus affirms that (Mt 7:7). With wisdom, we can see what the word calls misfortune as opportunities to glorify God and accomplish His purpose in us. In Luke’s gospel (11:11-13), it is the Holy Spirit Jesus said the Father would send. In Proverbs, Wisdom is a lady who seeks to reveal herself to seekers and in the New, the Holy Spirit is God who seeks to reveal Himself to seekers. He was promised to those who would reveal His truth in time (John 14:26; 16:13). God gives this wisdom generously – and without judgment. God gives with finding fault in us – and gives more than enough.

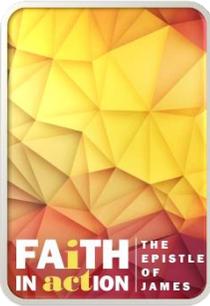
So, ask in faith without doubting. Since God gives abundantly, James says we should not expect God to answer us if we will not believe in His ability. God will not hesitate even though we will hesitate – waffle around like a rudderless boat in the sea. He calls this “double-minded-ness” in verse 8. Israel was warned not worship Yahweh with two hearts (De 26:16, c.f. Ps 12:2). And James has already shown the single-mindedness of God for believers. So, such two-minded people will remain unstable in all he does, not just his spiritual life. This instability is defined as disorder elsewhere (c.f. 1Co 14:33; 2Co 12:20).

About poverty (1:9-11). The “lowly” brother is contrasted with the “rich” brother in verse 10. In the Law, there was consistent law to be concerned for the poor. And in Solomon’s day, when his wealth came from God’s gift, the prophets began to castigate the rich because of their selfish indulgence to the harm of their fellow brother. He will return to this theme in 2:15-16 and say that such compassion is the result of faith – not the regulation of law. But the promise James brings is that the rich man “in his humiliation” will “fade away” through the trials he has just considered.

But who are these rich? The lowly man is a “brother” without question (v.9). One commentary argues “Grammatically, both the terms *brother* and *to take pride in* (verse 9) are linked to the rich man in verse 10” (Nystrom, 55). Ultimately, how would the words of exhortation from James for the rich (in this very context) mean anything if they were not in the community of Christ? It was the disparity between the brothers that itself presented the trial. And like the “cows of Bashan” in Amos 4:1-3 who were promised their judgment even as unauthentic sons of Abraham, so too these rich Christians, who are unauthentic and disingenuous with what their pride is really in, will face judgment for their sin. Even the Corinthians faced the same ungodly, class distinctions they had in Roman society, and faced the ire of Paul (c.f. 1Corinthians 11:17-22). These rich would need the wisdom of God to have a new perspective (they would have never learned in society) to see riches for what they are – transitory and often, an obstacle to begin to accept without reservation the standards of wealth that the world holds up and become dull to see the image of God in the poor around us.

The lowly will likewise rejoice in their testing (of poverty) because it provides them the opportunity to show their faithful endurance and to “inherit the earth” just as Jesus promised. If riches of this world are the treasure of our hearts, just as Jesus promised, for your treasure will be destroyed and stolen (Mt 6:19-20).

Choose what brings “real joy” (1:2).



Lesson 3

Faith and its rewards

The Epistle of James develops how faith should look in the life of a believer and the character of faith. One writer puts it this way, “His chief aim is plainly to impress his readers with a conviction that true Christianity is always a great moral power and will therefore reveal itself through growth in the energies and beauties of holiness,”

(Robert Johnstone). And in this section in the first chapter, **the proof that faith exists in us is our endurance of trials** (It will continue that there is proof in deeds of kindness (chapter 2); proof in self-control (chapter 3); proof in a godly life with others (chapter 4-5:6) and final words to be faithful). While faith does have its rewards – it must come through trials. James already said joy should come through trials (1:2); that God can provide the wisdom to make it through (1:5) but that like everything, it must be done in faith (1:6).

The next section of Scripture (1:12) begins again with the theme, “steadfast under trial” written in a way that reminds of Jesus’ beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. And, his wording closely matches Jesus (Mt 24:13) where we are told that only those who endure to the end will be saved. James doesn’t say the blessing is in no trials – or in light trials – but in remaining faithful through them – and manifesting the “love for Him” in that way. This incentive to endure caused Spurgeon to write, “There is a crown for me... Then will I gird up my loins and quicken my pace, since the crown is so sure to those who run with patience.” But what is this crown?

In several places in the New Testament, crowns are mentioned: 1) Everlasting Crown* (1Co 9:25), the Crown who was the People Paul taught (Ph 4:1; 1Th 2:19), the Crown of Righteousness (2Ti 4:8), the unfading Crown of glory (1Pt 5:4), and the Crown of Life (Ja 1:12; Re 2:10; 3:11). Even crown of thorns that Jesus wore is the same word (Jn 19:2,5). To Romans and Greeks, this *stephanos* was a crown that symbolized victory or reward. In the Greek Olympics, winners were awarded the *stephanos*, a laurel crown. In the Isthmian games, crowns were shaped from pine (Easton’s Bible dictionary). Of course, our vision of crowns are shaped by Queen Elizabeth II’s crown of 2,868 diamonds, 273 pearls, 17 sapphires, 11 emeralds, 5 rubies, including the Cullian II diamond or, the Second Star of Africa, which is 317.4 carats. But this would be a *diadem* (Greek) in Scripture, which is used of royal dignity (c.f. Re 12:1; 13:1; 19:12)

But *the reward* is not the crown itself – but what these crowns *represent*; just as the crowns represented the accomplishment of the athletes or the authority of the Emperor or Queen. John said, “And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life” (1 John 2:25), that is why it is a crown of Life. Peter said it was a crown of glory because when we are crowned, we will be glorified. For the Christian, there are not different types of crowns – just different ways of picturing the blessedness we await.

Temptation and Sin (1:13-15). James says succinctly, “Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God.” Temptation does not come from God. Though God allows it, He Himself does not entice us to evil. Human experience has shown us how prone we are to blame others when we find ourselves in trials. Yet by His very nature, God is unable to either be tempted (in the sense we are tempted, as James will explain), nor does He Himself tempt anyone. The great cause of sin, James says, is our desire – or lust.

JAMES 1:12-18

¹² Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.

¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

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

While God sometimes allows tests to come to His people, even some who might be thought of as His favorites (Job, Jo 1-2, or Abraham, Ge 12), or as a father does (He 12:9-11). Other times He may send tests as a form of judgment upon those who have rejected Him, such as sending a spirit to bring deception (1Ki 22:19-23) or departing from a man and refusing to answer him (1Sa 28:15-16). Yet in no case does God entice a person to evil. **Satan tempts: God tries.** But the same trial may be both a temptation and a trial.

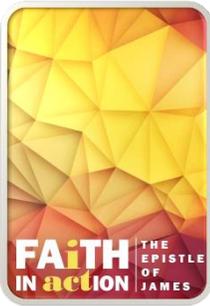
Each one is tempted when he is drawn away. The picture of being drawn away is either a metaphor taken from a fish enticed by a bait, and drawn after it, or rather from a harlot drawing a young man out of the right way and alluring him with the bait of pleasure to commit folly with her. In either case, the lure did not bring the fish to the hook, the fish followed his own impulse to the hook.

Satan certainly tempts us and uses what is in us as the draw: the desire for flesh, the desire of the eye and the pride of life. It has been around since the Garden. Then, "When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin" Desires that corrupt will lead to sin and when there is sin, there is death – spiritual death. This inevitable result is what Satan always tries to hide from us, but we should never be deceived about.

In this section we well, Verse 13 should caution us against attributing tragedy to God in statements like, "I guess God needed another angel in Heaven," or "Well, God has His reasons." One may mean well, but the words do not correctly reflect the nature of God as presented by James. In verse 14, James is making the case that God cannot be tempted. God is not the cause of our fall. What is in the equation that he uses: desire + temptation = sin. Remove one, and Satan loses his power. He can't tempt you with something you have lost a desire for, nor can your desires overwhelm you if you don't invite the temptation in.

Because God is Good and Perfect (16-18). Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above because James knows we are in trials and surrounded by sin and death. Of course, the ultimate goodness of any gift is measured with both its origins and its effects. Something that may seem to be only good (such as winning money in a lottery) may in fact be turned to our destruction. The gifts are perfect because God is: "with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." There is nothing secretive: He is the Father of lights. Some have noted that Greek is actually "the Father of the lights." The specific lights are the celestial bodies that light up the sky, both day and night. The sun and stars never stop giving light, even when we can't see them. Even so, there is never a shadow with God. When night comes, the darkness isn't the fault of the sun; it shines as brightly as before. Instead, the earth has turned from the sun and darkness comes. This means that God is always light – and is always good – and never changes. In the modern theology called "process theology" which asserts that God is "maturing" and "growing" and "in process" Himself from the god of wrath in the OT to the god of love in the New. Yet the Bible says that there is no variation or shadow of turning with God.

He brought us forth that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. We can see God's goodness in our salvation. He planned it from eternity (Ep 1:3ff) and through the Word (John 1:1,14), He was explained and for those He would draw to Himself through His word revealed in the Word, they would be His glory. These "first" fruits could be a reference to the "Jews" who "first" believed, suggesting that James anticipated a swelling harvest from Gentiles but that the swell of Gentiles converts began very quickly and was already creating difficulty with Jews. So, it is my view that the first fruits is in connection to the final harvest of our eternal redemption: the final reward of our faith – as proven that we are first fruits among His creatures.



Lesson 4

Faith and the Word

In the Epistle of James, we have seen how he introduced the life of Christians as joyous in trial and sturdy through temptation. Now, we have come to this well-known passage where James expands of this oft repeated theme to put our faith into action. He admonishes us to be "doers of the word, not hearers only". Let's explore how he connects the life of the Christian to the Word.

The phrase: "**Be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger,**" sounds like it was written in a modern era and great exhortation today. Yet, what it shows is the timeless wisdom of how a life lived in Divine wisdom will manifest itself.

When someone is quick to hear, it means they are willing to carefully listen and analyze what others are saying. To have biblical wisdom and keen insight, it's paramount to learn from mature Christians so that you don't make the same mistakes. This is why we should hear "quickly" so that we don't fall into a trap that can suddenly destroy us.

Also, if one is quick to hear, they will be slow to speak. In other words, by having active ears and practicing patience, our ability to control the tongue will also flow naturally due to self-discipline. Slow to speak doesn't mean to remain silent; it just means to listen more and talk less.

And when we are quick to hear and slow to speak, we will consequently be slow to anger. While anger is an emotion that can be out of control, it can be controlled by living and walking according to the Spirit in the fruit He brings (c.f. Galatians 5:13ff). As James clearly states, "the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God." While it is possible to be angry at sin, fight for justice, and seek honor in which this "anger" is "self-controlled" and channeled to the proper authorities.

This will accomplish righteousness. The anger of man will not. The likely meaning here is the righteous (life) God calls us to live because James will return to this theme in 3:8-12 where Christians are warned against cursing fellow believers. "Outbursts" rarely flow from righteousness within. Righteous action cannot spring from unrighteous anger.

In that connection, James says that **God calls us to put away all filthiness and wickedness** (the very thing that manifests itself in the "anger of man") and **receive the implanted word which is able to save our souls.** This "word" is the "word of truth" (1:18) It is also significant that we receive this word with "Meekness" (ESV) or "humility" (NASB). It is impossible for me not to see Moses here. The anger the Israelites escalated in his heart (Numbers 20) – that he allowed within him – was recorded after we are reminded that Moses was the most humble of all men (Numbers 12:3). Humility is something you and I must work at – not "achieve."

JAMES 1:19-28

¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;

²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.

²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.

²⁵ But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

²⁶ If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

He says it will “**save your souls.**” Scripture says we “have been saved” (Rom 8:24-25); we are “being saved” (1Cor 1:18) and that we “will be saved” (Rom 8:21-23). The word implanted will grow to the final result of saving our souls. We must nurture what we have so that what we have will be what we always have.

In that connection, then, James says, “**But be doers of the word, and not only hearers, deceiving yourselves.**” This is, according to James, how you see faith in yourself. Later in chapter 2 he will show how God sees faith and justifies us in it. Yet it was Jesus who said, “If you love me, obey my commands.” *There is no clearer statement than this.* In fact, Jesus will say in Luke 16:18 (as well as the sermon on the Mount) that our righteousness (‘doing’) must excel that of the Pharisees. If we say we have faith but do not obey, we are like a man who looks at his natural face in the mirror and then forgets what he looks like. Faith in God is clearly demanded and so is obedience. And each requires effort.

| 10

James says that we will be approved by the “law of liberty” (v. 12). But what is this “law of liberty”? Some have said that it is the Ten Commandments. Although Israel violated the law, the Mosaic Law was never a law to freedom – but instead a law that defined sin in order to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:19-29). It did not provide freedom from sin for us, nor could it produce righteousness in us because we were sinners. This “law of liberty” is the “royal law” (v. 9), or the law of God. God’s law remains our guide to holy living, and we must continue to obey all of its moral precepts lest we be revealed as lacking authentic faith. While we certainly stand in grace by faith, we live to be judged by faith in the deeds we have done in the body.

James then says that the one who looks into the perfect law of liberty and perseveres, **he will be blessed in what he does.**

Then, James shows another application: the control of our speech (even though anger usually manifests itself this way). *If anyone among you thinks himself to be religious while he doesn’t bridle his tongue, but deceives his heart, this man’s religion is worthless.* There really is no reason to debate what James is trying to express here. There is no worth to our religion if we will not manifest self-control in our speech. In their world, “free speech” was rarely protected by law. However, most people said what they thought – not matter the consequence. And this is the application James is making. It is not refusing to say bad or immoral things; it is restraining from saying useless things (c.f. Ephesians 4:29-32).

And then he makes an even more amazing statement: Religion that is pure and undefiled is to visit orphans and widows in distress and to keep oneself unstained from the world. I believe Paul mentions these two classes of people because they are vulnerable, needy, and were not able then (and today as well) to give anything else in return. When one devotes their time and energy to the most vulnerable, they are showing sacrificial love like God loves. As clearly noted, these are things that God calls individuals to live in their life.

Finally, believers are to keep themselves unspotted from the world. We are to be blameless and without blemish. God calls us to a life of obedience and devotion to His kingdom rather than the carnal kingdom of this world. We are sojourners, a peculiar people, distinct from others, and our lives should demonstrate this in front of the world. We are to be in the world, but not of the world (Rom. 12:2; 1 John 2:15).



Lesson 5

FAITH AND THE ROYAL LAW

When a student, Mahatma Gandhi considered becoming a Christian after being moved by reading the Gospels. He believed also that Christianity offered a solution to the caste system that had plagued the people of India. One Sunday, he went to a local church and asked to see the pastor. But when he entered, the ushers refused to give him a seat. They told him to go and worship with his own people. He left and never

went back “If Christians have caste differences also,” he said, “I might as well remain a Hindu” (from “Our Daily Bread,” [Feb., 1979]). That tragic story illustrates the sin that James writes against in our text.

In the first chapter, the recurring theme showed that the endurance of trials was evidence of faith. Now as chapter two begins, it will be compassionate benevolence. James addresses them as “my brethren” (1:2, 16, 19; 2:5, 14; 3:1, 10, 12; 4:11; 5:7, 9-10, 12, 19) that shows that he writes to Christians. He also says, “your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.” He commands, “Do not [have] personal favoritism.”

To illustrate the command, he says, when two men come into a gathering (called “synagogue”), one wealthy (noted by his gold ring and bright clothes) and one poor (noted by his dirty clothing), and you give a stand out “good place” to the rich man while the poor man is to stand out of the way, or to sit down on the floor, giving the rich man privileges and despising the poor man because of his poverty is evil. His point is that any judgments based on outward factors alone are wrong judgments because they do not discern the heart.

He then asks a question affirmatively whether or not if God chose the rich or the disenfranchised to be rich in faith. If God did not choose the rich man to get his money for the kingdom, He did not choose the poor man because of his poverty. *God’s choice to offer salvation is completely based on His grace.* James then says that preferential treatment to the rich aligns believers against God (c.f. James 5:1-6). God has not chosen the poor – he has chosen *people* who are poor but he chose others who were clearly not: Zaccheus, Nicodemus, Barnabas, Philemon, to name a few. However, it is often true that those who are poor materially who are also those who are poor in spirit (Matt. 5:3; Luke 6:20).

By choosing those whom the world rejects and despises, God magnifies the riches of His grace. When James says that God chooses the poor “to be rich in faith,” he means, rich in the sphere of faith. They have spiritual riches in Christ through God (Eph. 1:3-14) which makes them “heirs of the kingdom” (James 1:5). So, James’ first warning shows that partiality to the rich and against the poor is an evil because it puts us in the place of judge. By showing favoritism, we usurp the role that belongs to God alone.

James goes on to say (2:6-7) that partiality is wrong because it aligns you with God’s enemies. Asking two rhetorical questions, James says that believers are actually acting in alignment with the “rich” who are, generally speaking, their own enemies. While there were and are honest, considerate people of wealth, just as there are wicked poor people, the most powerful forces against the church came from the rich. Yet, the church should show God’s love and grace to all. The question also shows that God’s enemies use their strength to oppress – in contrast to God’s concern for justice (2:6). William Barclay wrote, “If a creditor met a debtor on the street, he could seize him by the neck of his robe, nearly throttling him, and literally drag him to the law-courts” (Daily Study Bible: the Letters of James & Peter, p. 67). In the Old Testament, Queen Jezebel was condemned when she hired false witnesses to accuse Naboth and execute him so she could gain his vegetable garden. God pronounced judgment on Jezebel as well as Ahab (1Kgs 21:1-24). The law demands that judges judge fairly (Deut. 16:18, 20; Ps. 82:3-4) and merchants should have just weights and measures (Deut. 25:15). Bribery was condemned (1Sam. 8:3; Ps. 15:5; 26:10; Amos 5:12). And the prophets confront

JAMES 2:1-13

1 My brothers and sisters, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.

2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and is dressed in bright clothes, and a poor man in dirty clothes also comes in,

3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the bright 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,”

4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?

5 Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters: did God not choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?

7 Do they not blaspheme the good name by which you have been called?

8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well.

9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the Law as violators.

10 For whoever keeps the whole Law, yet stumbles in one point, has become guilty of all.

11 For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but do murder, you have become a violator of the Law.

12 So speak, and so act, as those who are to be judged by the law of freedom.

13 For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

Israel for oppressing the poor, especially orphans and widows (Isa. 1:17; Jer. 22:15-16; Ezek. 22:7; Amos 4:1; 5:15, 24). Even in the New Testament, the echo of fairness is made: “Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven” (Col. 4:1).

The second rhetorical question is, “Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?” can be literally rendered: “which has been called upon you” (NASB, margin). This refers to the practice of a wife taking her husband’s name, or a child taking on the name of his father. Christians take the name of their Savior, Jesus Christ. Douglas Moo suggests that it could have been the Gentiles mocking the Christians’ God, or the Jews criticizing the Christian claims about Jesus. It may refer to unbelievers making fun of Christian morality or worship (James, p. 109).

Anticipating objections, James says that God’s law is love, but partiality violates that law (2:8-9). Perhaps he is assuming their response with “we were just following the golden rule.” His response would be, “That’s fine! If you claim to be fulfilling God’s law of love, you’re doing well! Keep it up!” As his readers begin to congratulate themselves, James goes for the issue at hand (2:9), “But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.” James calls the law “*the royal law*,” primarily, because it comes from the King, the Lord Jesus Christ. This emphasizes the authority of the law. James has just mentioned (2:5) that believers are heirs of the kingdom. As such, we must live under the law of the king because he has referred already to “the royal law” which probably refers to “the whole law as interpreted and handed over to the church in the teaching of Jesus” (NIGTC, James, 114).

James singles out the command from Leviticus 19:18, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” which is cited six times in the gospels, and twice with Paul (Rom 13:9, Gal 5:14). Jesus said it was the second great command, after, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37). Just prior to the command to love our neighbor, Moses wrote (Lev. 19:15), “You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly.” So part of biblical love for one’s neighbor includes treating each person fairly and impartially. If you care about how others treat you; treat them as you would want to be treated, Jesus said. So, in case anyone doesn’t get it, James goes on (2:9) to apply the law of love specifically to partiality. To show partiality to the rich while you treat the poor with contempt, or to show partiality to a certain race, while treating those of another race as inferior, is to commit sin. In case we didn’t understand those plain words, James adds, you “are convicted by the law as transgressors.”

To violate God’s law on any level is a serious matter (2:10-11). James says that if anyone keeps the entire law (something that no one has ever done, but for sake of argument, he assumes that it is possible), but stumbles in one point, he is guilty of all. In other words, the law is a unity, like a chain. A single broken link breaks the chain. Or, the law is like a mirror or window. A single, small crack means that it is broken. He does not mean that all the commands in the law are of equal importance, or that all sins are equal. Even Jesus said that was not the case (Matt. 23:23). It is an illustration.

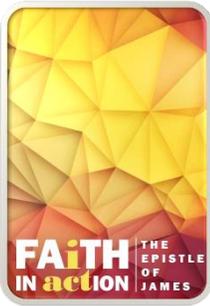
But why does James bring up (2:11) these two specific commandments, adultery and murder, and why does he mention them in the reverse order that they occur in the Ten Commandments? We can’t be certain. Still, discrimination against the poor and failure to love one’s neighbor is sometimes associated with murder (c.f. Jer 22:3, Jer. 7:6; Amos 8:4; 1 John 3:15.) So James is saying, “Don’t dismiss partiality as no big deal! It is a big deal, just as adultery and murder are big sins.”

Christians will be “judged by the law of liberty” (v 12, 25) or the “the royal law” (v. 8) and as noted before, this “law” takes up within it the OT law, but as understood through *Jesus’ fulfillment of it*. Still, while we are saved by grace through faith (Eph 2:8-9) and in Christ, “Therefore there is now no condemnation” (Rom 8:1), Christians are still told by Paul that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2Cor 5:10, Rom. 14:10-12).

When James says, “So speak and so act,” he is referring to our total conduct. Words alone are not enough, because it is easy to say to a poor brother, “Be warmed and be filled” (2:16). Our words need to be accompanied with godly actions – **faith in action** is the goal.

The first part 2:13 (i.e. “the merciless”) likely refers to unbelievers, whereas the last part refers to believers. Showing mercy to others demonstrates that you have already received mercy from God. As Jesus said (Matt. 5:7), “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” He did not mean that we earn or merit mercy by showing it to others. Mercy, by definition, is unearned! Rather, mercy flows to others from those who have received it from God. They will receive mercy in its fullness at the final judgment.

The last half of 2:13 refers to believers (i.e. “mercy”). Taken this way, “mercy” refers to either God’s mercy shown to us or to the mercy we show to others. If it refers to God’s mercy, it means, “Although we will be judged by the law of liberty, we know God will be merciful and in that mercy we will find triumph.” If it refers to the mercy we show to others, it means that when we are merciful toward others, we demonstrate “a heart made right by the work of God’s grace.” In either case, the ideas are connected as Jesus mentions in the model prayer. If God forgives me – why would I not forgive others?



Lesson 6

FAITH AND WORKS

James is one book that is extremely relevant for the modern church. Like Americans, Jewish Christians to whom James addresses his challenges are ensnared by worldliness (1:27b; 4:4) and are idolizing economic prosperity (2:2-4; 4:13). Their desire for material gain has prevented them from caring for the practical needs of others less fortunate (1:27a; 2:15-16). But much of the strength of James's rebuke of worldly Christians goes unheeded.

Sometimes, we may miss that because we see this section as merely a proof text to shun the "faith only" nemesis of the reformation movement. In my opinion, the primary purposes of the latter half of James 2 continues from the reading in 2:1 which challenges Christians actions as inconsistent with their calling and here intends to empower Christians to be more active in their good works that meet practical needs. The very heart and method of James's appeal in chapter 2 is to arouse acts of mercy from those who know they have already received the mercy of God. James simply said this to "believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ".

He is not discussing specifically their profession of faith in their beginning walk as Christians in the new birth (i.e. when they were saved); He is talking about the life a Christian should live. He is talking about a faith which was "active along with his works" which "completes" it and will fulfill the meaning that we "believed God" and that our faith is "counted to him as righteousness." It was how God counted it – not man. So if obedience in our faith as new Christians somehow discounts grace through faith, then obedience as Christians likewise discounts it. You cannot have it both ways.

Look at Abraham that is also used by Paul to illustrate God's justification of him by faith. By faith Abraham obeyed (Hebrews 11:8); Abraham was circumcised (Genesis 17:9) according to the covenant of circumcision even through the original covenant of blessing was reiterated (17:1-8) and Paul says that here God counted him righteous here (Romans 4:22) and James will say he was counted righteous again when he sacrificed Isaac (Genesis 22:1ff). It is first stated that God counted him righteous was he was around 85 years of age (c.f. Genesis 15:6, 16:16). But at 75 (Genesis 12:4) he had faith the writer of Hebrews wrote (11:8) and Paul said he had faith that saves without (the covenant of) circumcision (Romans 4:3, 4:9).

By definition, then, works is Paul's language is more a connection to "perfection" in that working (c.f. Romans 4:2-3). Salvation or Justification in every age, Paul says, has been based on faith. James will say justification is by faith – but evidently through how faith works in us.

Many other Scriptures offer commands directed to true believers to be busy in doing good deeds (Colossians 1:10; 2Thessalonians 2:17; 1Timothy 2:10; 5:10; 6:18; 2Timothy

JAMES 2:14-26

14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?

15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food,

16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good (i.e., benefit) is that?

17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

18 But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

20 Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?

22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works;

23 and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God.

24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

25 And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

26 For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

2:21; 3:17; Titus 2:7, 14; 3:13, 8, 14; Hebrews 10:24; James 3:13; 1Peter 2:12). It never presumes that good works will be done just because faith exists. Faith that will save will be faith that will be obey. However, we must not force the text to mean that the only way you will be saved is by obeying everything, everyday and in everyway because if you have one sin – even one – you will lose salvation. Grace and Mercy offer no condemnation (Romans 8:1) but do not offer a reason for lazy or prejudicial good-doing. We must do what God commands of us; That is not merit (c.f. Luke 17:10). Jesus said, “He replied, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it” (Luke 11:28).

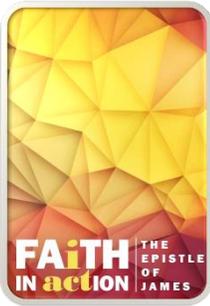
However, these are three take-aways from this section:

1. James is teaching that speaking our faith without doing our faith cannot meet practical needs.
2. While faith is invisible, faith is shown in our good works.
3. When good works of obedience are to our faith, our faith is complete.

Here is the main point: **real faith produces actions of faith.** In three illustrations of what real faith looks like.

- Example #1, what a no-example, is demons. He contrasts the actions that he sees in his audience that he wants to change. They believe – but do not do. And he says that the demons believe and shudder (2:19). They are not acting in harmony with the Voice of the One they believe is God. I think even implicit in this is that James knows that demons KNOW who God is and believe it. That’s all well and good. However, they only fear Him but will not act consistent with Him or His will. *Their faith did not manifest what it should.*
- Example #2 is Abraham (that we mentioned above.) James says that “the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” —. It is self evident that the faith Abraham had to be counted righteous is the faith that James is still pressing for these saved Christians to continue to have. It is not different “types” of faith. It is what “faith” is. *That faith he had manifested in what he did.*
- Example #3 is Rahab. James says in verse 25. If you want to read the story in greater detail you can find her story in Joshua 2-6. While Rahab begins her story, she is an illustration because she acted on what she believed. She “received the messengers and sent them out another way.” James does not inculcate that all she did was an act of faith – but in this she showed it. And in the story we read that she said to the spies, “I know Yahweh has given you the land... “For your God is God of heaven and earth” (Joshua 2:9,11). That faith she had manifested in what she did. This is why it says in Hebrews 11:31, “It was by faith that Rahab the prostitute was not destroyed with the people in her city who refused to obey God. For she had given a friendly welcome to the spies” (NLT). *That faith she had manifested in what she did.*

So as Paul exhorted in 2Corinthians 13:5, “Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine. Test yourselves (NLT)”, James exhorts with the statement, faith apart from works is dead.



Lesson 7

FAITH and the TONGUE

This chapter in James is full of metaphors. However, these can often obscure the point that James is trying to make in this passage, a point not only about speech in general (3:5-6) or even about teaching (3:1), despite the way he begins this chapter. Rather, in James 3, James' last application, which seems to be the focus he was heading to, is how faithful Christians should speak about other human beings made in God's own image (3:9). This is more than a paragraph on why people who teach should be vetted (even though James does not tell us to vet others but vet or analyze ourselves). And it is not merely a reality proverb to show how far reaching words can be in both their positive (upbuilding) and negative (destructive) force. Instead, it calls us to account for our own language that manifests itself with abusive language against other human beings. However, James builds to this point by his powerful images on human speech and on the potentially destructive power of the human tongue.

In the opening verses of chapter 3, James counsels the community that not many of them should become teachers. That same Greek sentence can read "do not become many teachers," that is, do not turn into a community that thinks you all can or should teach. His rationale: teachers, himself included, will be judged more harshly than anyone else. Although James does not specify by whom teachers will be judged in 3:1, in other part of this letter, he intimates that God will be the judge of the believer (4:12; 5:9).

James' warning concerns one specific aspect of teaching: how teachers speak, that is, **the control teachers have over what they say** (3:2). Teachers of James' day gave public discourses to which students and other hearers gathered to hear – and were captive to the hour or hours of the teacher's doing. Imagine how easily someone might be led astray by a misplaced or unintended word within that discourse. Still, even more so, who could imagine that every teacher who teachers would never once misspeak, never once chose an unfortunate word or phrase, or, never once teach something in error based only on what he knows at the time (c.f. Apollos)! James commands those who teach (and those who listen to them to teach) to consider this aspect of the importance of teachers in our lives, and particularly the impact of a teacher's word on the life of those who hear.

James continues his discussion by turning to two metaphors: a horse's bit and a ship's rudder (3:3-4). He makes a similar point for each of these. Rudders represent a very small portion of a ship, and bits are not much larger than a horse's hoof. Yet, each of these small items controls the direction of the much bigger body to which they are attached. Here, too, James speaks about the tongue, in this instant as a driver that controls the direction of a person.

What does it mean to think of one's tongue as that which controls one's whole being? Or perhaps, in today's language, what does it mean to think of one's entire being as controlled by what we say in our assemblies and even more, what we post on social media? It should be self evident why this text would give all of us pause about speaking and sharing things that "*the will of the pilot directs*" with his or her own

JAMES 3:1-12

1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

2 For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.

3 If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well.

4 Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs.

5 So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!

6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.

7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind,

8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.

10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water?

12 Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

words, both spoken and digital, and pause to consider not only how it affect our lives (by “staining the whole body” and especially how in the wider community of the church and in the society in which we live can just as profoundly be stained by what we say.

This first metaphor of comparison of the tongue to a **fire** shows that it can *quickly engulf* a forest. Here, James says it can even boast about how widespread it can wield influence. Positively, we can see how the “world was turned upside down” and how the tongue “proclaimed [the gospel] in all creation under heaven” (Colossians 1:23). Yet, the reverse is equally – and even more dangerously – so. The unjust world enters the faith community and the tongue can set fire within us the flame of hell itself (3:6). Throughout this letter, James will remind us again and again about his concerns about the taint of “the world,” even warning that friendship with the world signals enmity of God (4:3).

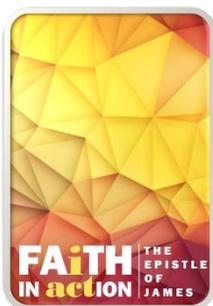
Then, James shifts to more metaphors: **A World** (6). The tongue is “a world of unrighteousness.” Once, a magazine printed pictures of unusual angles of subjects that made them appear different than they were. One, looking very much like the moon with all its craters — a dark world of death – ended up being a picture of a human tongue. That image, shows how appropriate to consider the tongue like an entire world of death and darkness, full of dangerous craters; **A Stain** (6). The tongue is “set among our members, staining the whole body.” If we are careful how we dress for important (let alone common) functions, how significant is to consider how words stain the appearances we are making to the world? **A Restless Evil** (8). The tongue mimics Satan in this respect, who, having rebelled against the God of peace, can never settle. He goes to and fro throughout the earth (as in Job 1:7; 2:2), like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). The tongue that is under his lordship always shares that tendency; **A Deadly Poison** (8). James shares the same as Paul who said that this “venom of asps” is under the lips of sinners, “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive” (Romans 3:13).

If pure and undefiled religion exists at all, to James it will remain unstained by the world (1:27). And so, the tongue, which has the capability of destroying another man’s life and our own religious life, how urgent should we be about controlling what we say? The applications we could expand here from what James refers to as destructive “speech,” could be more broadly defined to apply beyond gossip (which is our usually first application); If we think more introspectively and critically, we can see enormous applications to political rhetoric of our day, the racist and prejudicial speech against people of other colors, the hate-mongering against immigrants, or even the practice of “trolling” on social media looking for a “hill to die on.” Is that the power James wants our tongue used for?

In 3:7-12, James reaches the climax of this part of his letter. Why does James consider the tongue a “restless evil full of deadly poison” (3:8)? Consider, says James, how we the church speak. We bless God and with the same tongues we curse one another (3:9).

James uses metaphor again to show how this behavior could compare to one’s gathering together of olives from a fig tree, or salty and sweet water from the same spring (3:11-12). James, here, invites consideration of how we speak *to one another* as members of the church. Yet, his application is to those who were made in the image of God (3:9). Yet, if we cannot speak kindly, compassionately and righteously to those of “like precious faith,” how can we even speak to those who are yet to become a part of a spiritual family?

Implicit in James, I would suggest is the advice passed on to me by my mother: “If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all.” Silence of the tongue is not only as a means to listen for God but also as a spiritual practice of serving others.



Lesson 8 FAITH and CONDUCT

After the emphasis in the previous paragraph on speech against other “people who are made in the likeness of God” (3:9), James continues here with demanding that “by his good conduct, let [a Christian] show his works in the meekness of wisdom.”

We all want peaceful and harmonious relationships with people, especially Christians and yet, many homes and churches experience perennial conflict. Some position these episodes of conflict with a spiritual twist because we are “defending the truth” or standing on principle. There is certainly a place for defending the truth. But there is a right and a wrong way to contend for the truth. The great defender of the faith, Paul, wrote to Timothy “The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will” (2Timothy 2:24-26).

However, James is not suggesting that we not have disputes because “love is more important than doctrine.” Here, especially to those who do teach (3:1), he says that all that, even correcting those who are in opposition to the truth, we must do it with kindness, patience, and gentleness. The churches that James addressed were experiencing conflict and trials without (chapter 1) and as we will see more of this next week in chapter 4, were experiencing it with each other. James wrote, “But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart,” (4:3) and this conditional clause indicates that it was a problem – not hypothetical.

Wisdom defines good conduct. With the question in verse 13, James transitions into dealing with the relationship between wisdom and personal conduct (3:13-18): **Who is wise and understanding among you?** If we are to control our tongues, we need wisdom because Divine wisdom produces right words and right actions.

Wisdom is the ability to look at things from God’s viewpoint. It is more than knowing facts about the Bible but the correct use of those facts. Wisdom is something God gives from understanding the principles of Scripture; it does not come from self. Just as Paul said to Corinth, “However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God...” (1Corinthians 2:6-7).

In addition to wisdom, there is understanding. This is the only time the New Testament uses this Greek word for “understanding.” A person with this “understanding” is someone who has more than knowledge; instead, he is prudent, skilled, intelligent, experienced, and has expertise. This is a term of special mental perception or comprehension of God’s Word. It is **someone who can apply his experience** to the art of living a God-oriented life.

But this wise conduct is connected also to meekness (3:13). “Meekness” (Greek, *prautes*) is not merely a single word concept. The BDAG says, “The quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance.” Therefore, some translate the word “*humility*” to explain the concept. However, humility is not all of what is being described. In classical Greek, the word was used of people who were *gracious and mild*. Further, when this word was used of things, it meant “*gentle*.” The word was even used of a horse that had been broken. So, the Greeks said the word meant “*power under control*.” So, if we bind these ideas together when we think of meekness (and is probably why some translations simply stay with the word “meekness”), it carries the idea of humility, gentleness, and mildness, but not because of weakness, but because of power that has been placed under control by wisdom.

Worldly wisdom defines bad conduct. James then contrasts the right way with the wrong way from wrong-headed wisdom (3:13-16). If a person has envy, jealousy, and selfishness in the heart, that person is living a lie: “You are false to the truth” (14). You are claiming to be wise, but you are living in a way that denies it. **Acting with jealousy and**

JAMES 3:13-18

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.

14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.

15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

envy shows that we do not have godly wisdom. This lack of meekness (3:13) will spring from one's wrong-headed sense self-importance." Worldly wisdom says, "I will take care of myself." Worldly wisdom says, "I deserve this" and "I demand that." "I demand respect." "I deserve attention." This is how the world teaches us to think and act. But James condemns such thinking.

James says that this wisdom is not from above, but it is "earthly, unspiritual, and demonic." When we act and think like this, we are acting like we are people of this world, and not of the heavenly King Jesus above. Our vision and behavior have been defined by the earthly and, to make the sinfulness of it clear, the demonic. Further, James calls this wisdom "unspiritual." We are not acting or thinking spiritually, but naturally. Paul used similar language to condemn carnal, worldly thinking (Romans 8:7; 1Corinthians 3:1-4). When we act like this and think we are "of God," it is earthly, unspiritual and demonic. We should stop deceiving ourselves that red-faced arguing is somehow spiritual. Godly wisdom is not the wisdom of the world. Godly wisdom is nothing like the wisdom that comes from this earth.

The result of this, James says in verse 16, is "jealousy, envy, and selfish ambition, [where] there will be disorder and every vile practice." This is evident all around us. As our culture rejects the teaching of the Divine, there will be an increase of disorder and every vile practice. As churches do the same, it will be the same with them. Why is there crime? Why is their division? Because people are not seeking His Wisdom. Families become more disorderly and broken. Relationships are damaged. Society crumbles. And it is not an election that will win us back – it will be wisdom.

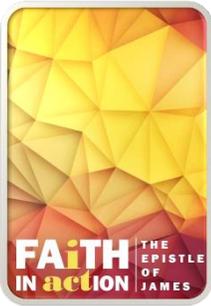
Seek the wisdom above. James now describes the wisdom from above. The first characteristic is **purity**. The pure life is clearly a life that is obedient to godly wisdom. Pure living shows godly, spiritual wisdom. The next three characteristics have alliteration and rhyme (see BAGD). The three in Greek are: *eirenikos* (i-ray-nee-kos), *epieikes* (ep-ee-i-kace), *eupeithes* (a-yoo-pe-thace) which are translated in the ESV as: "**peaceable, gentle, open to reason.**" These characteristics describe **disposition**.

The next set of qualities reveal the wise person's **conduct**. James says that those with godly wisdom are *full of mercy and good fruits*. In Greek, these words have some rhyme to them. The Greek reads: *mestos eleos kai karpos agathos*. In the ESV, the English is "**full of mercy and good fruits.**" James says that we are not conducting ourselves by Divine Wisdom *when we do not manifest* mercy and good fruits. Further, he is quite emphatic by reminding his readership that their lives should be "**full of this** – instead of it being the exception – it should be the self-evident norm. This will show that God's wisdom is at work in our lives.

The last set of descriptions (3:17) also have alliteration and rhyme in the Greek [*adiakritos* (ad-ee-ak'-ree-tos) kai *anupokritos* (an-oo-pok'-ree-tos)] and is translated in the ESV as "**impartial and sincere.**" The NASB reads, "**unwavering and without hypocrisy.**" The Christian cannot walk in Divine Wisdom and be fake or vacillating in the face of challenges. Christians are sincere and true in their actions, a clear contrast to the double-minded man (1:8).

The Harvest of this Wisdom. James says that this way of life will bring righteousness sown in peace by those who make peace. Just as he said earlier, "The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (1:20), James points out that when we have *godly wisdom that is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy, good fruits, unwavering, and sincere, then we are producing the righteous life that God demands*. The ESV's translation of "harvest" is equally significant: We reap what we sow. If a farmer sows corn, he reaps corn, not beans. If you sow peace, you will reap peace. If you sow selfishness and strife, you will reap conflict. Also implicit in the verse is the fact that a harvest *is not accidental or unanticipated*. No farmer sits around doing nothing all year, then goes out into the field and says, "Whoa, look at that bountiful harvest!" If there is a harvest, it's in part because he has worked hard to cultivate that harvest. If you see a church or a home where there is peace, it is because the members have worked to cultivate peace. They have listened to one another, respected one another, judged their own selfishness and pride, and sought to live in accordance with godly wisdom, not worldly "wisdom."

Settling of disputes often occurred in English pubs. So, in 1955, Sir Hugh Beaver of the Guinness brewing company decided that an official record was needed to resolve these disputes – often over people and animals. Now called *the Guinness Book of World Records*, it has been a best seller ever since (www.history.com). We have a far better best seller to help us to live harmoniously: *the wisdom of God's Word*. But because of selfishness, pride, and jealousy, many Christians have used the Bible to attack others and to justify themselves. James wants us to apply godly wisdom to our personal lives and relationships to cultivate peace.



Lesson 9

FAITH against WORLDLINESS

After emphasizing wisdom that is true which brings peace (3:13-18) James turns to the evidence of false wisdom which finds its origins in Satan (3:15; 4:2, 7). As Christians resist the devil (4:7), the pride generated in false wisdom must be humbled with somber grieving (4:9). This pride manifests itself in boasting (3:14) and this selfish ambition comes from a heart needing cleansing (4:8). This “friendship with the world” as James terms it is “enmity with God” (4:4) and is the worldliness that faith must stand against.

In the letter, James, like Jesus, sets before us two ways: earthly wisdom or heavenly wisdom, selfishness or love, the world or God. And with the contrasts James gives even more graphic calls to stand (4:8-9): “resist the devil – draw near to God;” “Wash your hands – Purify your hearts;” “Laughter to mourning – Joy to gloom;” and “Humble yourself before God – He will exalt you.”

IN this paragraph calling Christians to repentance, James shows there are substantive and significant differences between the values a Christian should have and the Roman world in which they lived. And it is in this application that James tells us to have faith against such worldliness.

The evidence, however, of this worldliness is quarrels and fighting among the people of God, a picture of the early church we forget was present. They were, evidently, beset with jealousy, selfish ambition, slander, anger, and even the desire to depart from healthy teaching. That James mentions behaviors more than teaching here indicates that the problem was yet unsolved – and likely the teachers in these churches were not leading people to resolutions but instead – further worldly wisdom. They were being encouraged to believe that their passions should be fulfilled despite pursuing heavenly wisdom. The “passions” or desires were viewed by Jewish rabbis as the seat of human organs or members of the body. Peter will call this “sinful desire” (1Peter 2:11) and Paul will picture “two laws” within him “waging war” in him (Romans 7:22-23). What we see in this practically is a distinction that those whose hearts are worldly with cultivate these passions rather than control them. And James reminds them that the desire will never be fulfilled (4:2) but result instead with horrific results: murder, quarreling and fighting. While most consider this “murder” as a metaphor, it is possible that “various positions on {living under} Roman rule existed within in the church, just as it is beyond doubt that those who collaborated with the Romans were traitors. It is significant that James adds the reason for this killing as covetousness” (Nystrom, 224).

We have another wonderment in verse 5. In this exhortation of verse 4-6, James, like a wise old father, wants the people to wake up, rub their eyes and look at the mirror of themselves (1:23) and see what they

JAMES 4:1-10

1 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.

3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

4 You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

5 Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”?

6 But he gives more grace. Therefore, it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

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

8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

9 Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

really are – evidenced by what they are really doing. And then he adds that this exhortation is found in Scripture: “the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us””? Yet, there is no clear passage in the Old Testament that he quotes. He could have Exodus 34:14 in his mind (though it is reference – not a quote). Yet, it is most likely James summarizes everything Scripture said to him in reference to God’s jealousy over His people. And verse 6 follows with Proverbs 3:34 (c.f. Psalm 138:6). But there is question over what God is jealous for in verse 5. Is it the Holy Spirit? Or is it us? (or is it both). In the final analysis, it is that God has made it possible for all of us to be His people (John 1:12-13) and offers help and wisdom to those who ask (James 1:2). Yet, when we follow the world’s wisdom, we will never reach the goals we have set – and in the process we alienate the One who has given us the blessing to achieve it.

So in verses 7-10, as noted above, James calls Christians to repent. And in this call to repentance are ten imperatives or commands to stave off the worldliness in the faith of the people to whom he wrote:

1. **Submit to God:** you think you have been submitting to God – but you have not.
2. **Resist the Devil:** just as God “opposes” (Same word as in Proverbs 3:34) the proud, oppose the devil.
3. **Come Near to God:** this is not conversion (they are already Christians) but instead, contrition.
4. **Cleanse your hand (or Wash):** again, this is a call to penitence in believers.
5. **Purify your heart:** There was regular poetic connections of the Heart and the Hand – the connection between outward acts coming from inward dispositions (Psalm 24:4; 73:13). This “double-minded-ness” (1:8) manifests itself in actions that are not consistent with what we believe.
6. **Be wretched (miserable, NASB):** the first of three visible acts of contrition suddenly strike the honest heart.
7. **Mourn:** a nod to the call of Jesus in the sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are those who mourn” (Matthew 5:4) with the same promise (He will draw near to you and He will exalt you).
8. **Weep:** Once realized, there should be evidence of one’s awareness of the harm they have brought upon the community of believers by pursuing the false way.
9. **Laughter and Joy to mourning and gloom:** A clear manifestation of vivid emotional change.
10. **Humble yourself in the presence of the Lord:** The “presence” of the Lord is where He is met in worship and in prayer. Hence, in the call to repentance, these Christians were to humble themselves before the Lord and accept from Him their rebuke and their forgiveness.

The emphasis of calling Christians to repentance in James’ letter should not be missed. It emphasizes the danger Christians face if they persist in their sin (Hebrews 3:12-13; 6:4-6). It reminds us that the “church” is not savior – only Jesus is. People plagued with worldliness will only fight and “devour one another” (Galatians 5:13-15).

And in this call to repentance, James shows three things to remind us how to live:

- 1) **Draw Near to God:** This is an image of worship Jew and Christian should recognize (Leviticus 21:21) and means more than just a resolution to “get your life right” but instead to come before God Himself, in His presence. There will be no life in us if we do not come to Life before us.
- 2) **Cleanse and Purify:** As noted before, this is reminiscent of Jewish worship – and precisely the removal of the pollution that sin brings to the life and the body of the person. To be present before God, we must be holy (Leviticus 10:10). And just as individual sin tarnished and affected the community and the nation (Numbers 35:33-34), Christians should be reminded of their influence in the communities in which they live.
- 3) **You Can Be Clean:** The power of the sacrificial blood offering of Christ makes our forgiveness possible (Hebrews 10:4-14). And it is in that sacrifice we find the empowerment to live holy lives.