

James - Believers' Instruction Book

17 weeks

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James - Believers' Instruction Book

This was originally an expository series of sermons given in the church where I was serving as Pastor. A few years later, they were edited to be used as a Bible Study. There are a few things I feel I should share with you before using this material:

First: I had no intent of sharing or publishing this material until encouraged to do so by some friends. While I did consult several commentaries as I was preparing the original sermon series, I did not make notes of the references used in the messages. There was not in the beginning, nor is there now, any intent to plagiarize. Should you see anything you feel is the original thought of another, I ask for your grace and mercy.

Second: In my notes for teaching (or preaching), I tend to spell certain words phonetically for the purpose of emphasis. When transforming these notes from sermon notes to teaching notes, I felt inclined to leave a number of these phonetic spellings. They help me to make emphasis in the lesson at particular points.

Third: In my notes for teaching (or preaching), I make little effort to conform to rules of grammar. One example is that I often use a hyphen (-) to indicate a point where I may want to pause slightly and to keep certain thoughts connected as I speak. Another example is that I will use local colloquialisms to make points in the message.

Please accept that these notes are not an academic work. But I do hope they will help the preacher or teacher to be able to more quickly prepare their own sermon or teaching.

James – 01 Remembered As

History informs us that James became the first Bishop, or the Head, of the Jerusalem Church shortly after the death and resurrection of Jesus. We also learn, James was respected by the Jewish leaders - for a while at least.

James was held in high regard by those first Believers. They accepted him as their first Church Head. And James was held in high regard by the Jewish leaders. This tells us something of the integrity and caliber of the man – James.

After a few of years, the Jewish leaders begin to feel too many people were becoming followers of Jesus. They went to James at the beginning of one of the great feasts and took him to the upper wing of the Temple. They asked him to stand there and persuade the people to stop following after the way of Jesus.

James, instead, gave a powerful testimony to the Messiah-ship of Jesus. This made them so angry that they ran over to him and threw him off the upper wing of the Temple to the courtyard below in order to kill him. James did not die from the fall and continued to give testimony of Jesus.

The Jewish leaders hurried down to the courtyard and began to stone James. Instead of being killed, James knelt down and began to pray for those who were stoning him – asking God to forgive them because they did not understand what they were doing. One of the Jews who dyed clothes for a living, rushed forward with the stick that he used in picking the clothes from the vats – and he used it to beat James over the head until he killed him.

The last words they heard from him was his praying for those who were killing him. This is the caliber of person who was used by the Holy Spirit to write the letter we know as the book of James in our New Testament.

Read James 1:1 and make notes:

Most Bible scholars agree that the author of this letter is the James who is a physical brother of Jesus – another son of Mary. And while most Bible scholars agree on this issue of James being the author – there are several details over which they disagree.

This James would be a Jew who has become a Christian. Many Bible scholars view the fact that this James was a Jew. And interpret his statement “the twelve tribes scattered” as referring to the Jewish tribes. They see James as writing this letter to the Jews – maybe hoping to reach them with the Gospel and lead them to become Christians.

James – 01 Remembered As

But there are some, and I am one of these, who believe James was writing to Christians – those who have become spiritual Israel. This letter is written after the Christians have fled Jerusalem due to persecution and have scattered to various parts of the earth. And it seems completely acceptable to understand this Jew would use phrases and words that he was accustomed to using. It is also reasonable to see the Holy Spirit inspiring James to write this letter to Christians; but in a fashion that would also catch the attention of Jews.

I add to this short argument. The letter of James may not have been accepted into the New Testament by the early leaders of Christianity if they believed it was a message to the Jews only. And the letter of James reads more like instructions to Believers, than it does as an evangelistic message to non-Believers.

Following the stoning of Stephen – a great persecution broke out against the Christians in Jerusalem. Believers became scattered over the face of the known world.

This James, held in high regard by the Jewish leaders - and held in high regard by the followers of Jesus – sent this letter out to the Believers who had been scattered very soon after the scattering took place.

I believe the best view is to see this letter as having been written to the Believers who have been scattered. They have become scattered because they have suffered persecution for the sake of righteousness. And this thought of having suffered for righteousness sake is touched upon later in the letter.

Let's look at a couple of words used in the opening statement of this letter. James calls himself a "*servant*". Some translations use the word "slave" – others "bond servant". The Greek word used here is "doulos" (doo'-los) – it literally means: "one who gives himself up to another's will; devoted to another to the disregard of one's own interests."

The word can be used to refer to a slave; one who is forced into serving another. But it also can be used – as I believe it is here – to refer to one who has voluntarily given himself to another.

Read the following verses and make notes:

Romans 1:2

2 Peter 1:4

James – 01 Remembered As

Revelation 19:10

This was not only said about the apostles; read the following verses and make notes:

Colossians 4:12

Jude 1:1

The Greek word James used, says he is something more than one who waits on tables - and something more than one who helps another person in their cause. James used a word that says he has devoted himself to the cause of Christ – even to the point of disregarding his own interest.

He used a word that declares he has given himself up to the “Will of God” and to the “Will of Jesus”. The Bible declares “no man can be the servant of two masters” – but we recognize the “Will of God” and the “Will of Jesus” are one and the same “Will”.

By James saying it this way, he is saying something significant to his Jewish relatives, neighbors, and friends. James is declaring that he has not abandoned God to follow after Jesus. James is declaring he has devoted himself to the Will of God – this is an important thing for any Jew. But James is also declaring that he has devoted himself to the Will of Jesus – this is an important thing for any Christian.

James viewed becoming a follower of Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of being a Jew. James did not see it as changing boats in mid-stream – but more of reaching the port for which the boat set sail. James did not abandon being a Jew – but rather took it to maturity. James appears to have understood what it meant when Jesus said upon the cross, "it is finished."

We have today many people who are Christians – and they are trying to embrace many of the customs of Old Testament Jews. They are trying to incorporate the symbols of the Jewish people into their Christian practices. There are Christians today who are trying to incorporate some of the religious articles of clothing into their religious wardrobe.

James – 01 Remembered As

Some Christians today are trying to take certain items used in the Jewish services and incorporate them into their Christian services. Things like wearing a Jewish prayer shawl – blowing of the shofar – sometimes even saying some of their prayers in Hebrew.

It is appropriate to call these people Jewish Christians. They are Christians – but they are trying to live out their Christianity in a Jewish manner. Those who are Jewish Christians are "Jew-like" Christians. If they are not careful, Jewish Christians, while accepting Jesus as the Messiah, can remain focused upon observing the practices of the legal Old Covenant.

It is of some importance that we recognize James was not a Jewish Christian. James was a Christian Jew. James was born a Jew - he was raised in the tradition and customs of the Jews, his blood line – from both father and mother – was that of a Jew.

When James accepted Jesus as the long awaited Messiah – he did not cease to be a Jew. Neither did James try to continue to follow all of the specific Jewish practices. James, the Jew, was now a Christian.

The Christian Jew is more focused on following the example of Christ Jesus than they are in following Jewish tradition. And this is something many of the Christians today are failing to comprehend.

It appears that many of the Jewish Christians today are focusing on returning to Jewish practices more than they are following Christ. If they are not careful, they are in danger of missing the leading of the Holy Spirit in these last days. In short they are in danger of missing the “New Thing” due to being focused on returning to the “Old Thing.”

This is one little subtle thing – but a profoundly important thing – that is revealed in this letter. In the book of James, we see that the message of works is not totally abandoned – but it is no longer given high priority – as it was for the Jews. James will tell us to keep up the works, but that under Christ, the works are dead and meaningless if there is not accompanying faith.

That’s something new in Christ from what the Jews have taught and practiced for generations. For the Jew, it was enough to do the right thing! For a Christian, we must do the right thing with "Faith." In the book of James we see something of a message that Christianity is not a new religion, it is rather the consummation of the old religion.

Another word that is worth examining is the word translated “*Greetings*”. It is unfortunate this word is translated as “greetings” in several English translations. It is the Greek word “*chairō*” (khah’-ee-ro) – it literally means: "to rejoice, be glad; to rejoice exceedingly."

It was common for letters written in Hebrew to open with a wish for “Peace” (Shalom); letters written in Latin would usually open with wish for “Health” (Salutem); and it was the typical way to open a letter written in Greek with “Joy be to you.”

James – 01 Remembered As

To translate this word as “greetings” – can allow us to miss the impact I believe it had in the original language. To translate it as “Joy be to you” – following the meaning of the Greek word – gives us a continuity with the rest of the letter. In the very next verse James says we should “count it as pure joy” when we face trials.

There are 3 basic points that will help us in understanding the message in the Letter of James:

#1 – Let’s focus more on following Christ than keeping up the old tradition.

There were those in the Early Church who tried desperately to get the New Christians to follow the Old Jewish practices. They wanted these new converts to Christianity to be circumcised, to perform certain rituals, etc. In short, they wanted these new converts to follow the procedures that was laid out for non-Jews to convert to Judaism.

Those in the Early Church who kept their focus on the old baptism – the old law – the old way - missed the greater blessing that was being poured out upon the Believers. Those in the Early Church who kept on trying to keep the focus on the old ways of doing the religious thing – missed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

James, a Jew by birth, a Jew by nationality, a Jew by religious training and conviction – Chose to focus on following Christ more so than on the old ways. James did not miss the New. Will we miss the New Thing God is going to pour out in our day?

(make notes of your thoughts on this point)

#2 – True Christ-like love will not be limited to just one local church.

James didn’t just give the message to the Believers in Jerusalem. He gave the message to all Believers – wherever they may be; Asia, Europe, Africa, everywhere. Are we only doing the things that will benefit our local church? Or do we also do what we can to benefit other churches – and other ministries?

As faithful Believers – we should strengthen and grow the local church we are a part of, but we should be encouraging – strengthening – and building other churches and other ministries as well. It is worth saying again; **true Christ-like love will not be limited to just one local church.**

James – 01 Remembered As

(make notes of your thoughts on this point)

#3 – How do we want to be remembered?

Today, it is quite normal – or usual – for someone to publicly proclaim their qualifications – maybe to display their accomplishments for all to take notice of. James, as did a number of the apostles, preferred humility rather than boasting.

James had something to brag about – he was blood kin to Jesus. He had known Jesus longer than any of these other men – who probably only met him as an adult. But James chose the way of humility.

More than any worldly dignity and more than any worldly reputation – James wanted to be known as a servant of Jesus. James doesn't appear to want to be remembered as the First Head of the Church in Jerusalem – which he was – but only as a servant of Christ.

How is it that we want to be remembered? “I'm the one who led the most people to Jesus.” “I'm the one who organized and started the most ministries.” “I'm the one who raised the most money for the church.” Or will we choose: “I just tried to be a good servant at whatever the Lord wanted me to do”

James chose to be known by his spiritual relationship to Jesus rather than his biological relationship to Jesus. James didn't highlight his position or authority as an apostle, or as the official Head of the Church. James acknowledged his position as a servant.

Maybe we should be encouraged to be remembered by our spiritual relationships more so than our worldly relationships.

(make notes of your thoughts on this point)

James – 01 Remembered As

Write your thoughts or questions on this lesson and bring with you to discuss with the group when we meet next:

James – 01 Remembered As

(this page for additional notes)

James – 02 Count As Joy

The world in which we live is a battlefield. The forces of evil are constantly attacking those who are on the side of good. And from what I read in the Bible, this will continue to be the case until our Lord comes back to take His people to the home He has prepared for us.

Many of us have served for a time in one of the branches of our nation's military. After we completed our term of duty, we were discharged from the military. There is no discharge for the Lord's army – there is only graduation to our new home. As long as we are alive on this earth, we will continue to be in the Lord's army, and we will continue to be attacked by the forces of evil.

If you remember from the first lesson from James, it was shared that James wrote this letter shortly after the Christians in Jerusalem had experienced sufficient persecution to cause them to scatter to various parts of the world. This letter was sent to Believers who had not only experienced a significant physical persecution – but were presently experiencing all kinds of trials.

Most of the countries and towns to which they had fled in an attempt to escape the persecution in Jerusalem – had very different societies, customs, and practices than they were accustomed to. It is also helpful to remember – this James who was used by the Holy Spirit to write this letter – is the same James who prayed for God to forgive his attackers as they beat him to death with a stick. James was not one of those who thought one thing and then lived another.

Read James 1:2 and make notes:

It is quite noteworthy that James does not equate joy with pleasure. If we listen to the mouthpieces of our temporary society – we could get the idea that pleasure is synonymous with joy.

In v2, James instructs Believers to “count it pure joy” when we “face trials of many kinds” – this at the very least gives us a clue that the Christian definition of “joy” is something other than mere physical pleasure. For the Christian, “joy” is when a person makes some progress toward becoming more Christ-like in their daily life.

The typical Jewish rabbi in James' day taught that the “chastisements of love” are very precious – like a father's chastisement of his son. So in a sense the Jewish concept of “joy” was also something other than physical pleasure.

When someone falls into a temptation, they may describe the temptation as a raging torrent, which no one could make it across. But we must ask ourselves; was the temptation really a raging torrent. Others face the very same temptation and they make across without falling into it.

James – 02 Count As Joy

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13 and make notes:

It is God's intention that we not fall into the temptations which come our way. God has even promised He will not allow any temptation to come our way that we cannot handle. And He further promises to always provide a way out of the temptation that does come to us. Does the athlete win a trophy without being tested and tried?

Satan persuades us to sin – our flesh is attracted to the sin – but it is our own mind that gives consent to the sin. We naturally have a tendency to fall into some degree of depression – when we find ourselves being tried and tested.

James is encouraging Christians to resist this urge to become depressed when we are being tried – and instead begin to “count it as pure joy”. So, why does James think we should count our trials as “pure joy”?

Read James 1:3-4 and make notes:

Very few of us would ever say that we “just love being tested or tried” in the moral or spiritual arenas. Maybe that stems from some basic human trait of not wanting to be tested. Have you considered that most of us don't like moral and spiritual tests – because we have a history of failing some of these moral and spiritual test?

We have a memory – and we remember how we were hurt – and maybe how we caused others to hurt – when we failed the test. We arrive at a conclusion that the failing of the test is what caused the pain – so if there are no tests – then there will be no pain.

If there are no test, then there is nothing to fail! It has never been the test that caused the pain! It has always been the failures of people that has caused the pain. The test doesn't cause pain! Sin causes pain! It is time we as Christians – begin to adjust our attitude toward spiritual trials and tests.

When someone is working toward a graduate level academic degree – there are many tests they are required to take. Unlike the majority of the test in undergraduate studies, these tests are not designed to determine a grade or score.

James – 02 Count As Joy

In graduate level studies, most of the tests given are to help the student to be able to determine what areas they have acquired understanding – and what areas need more work. At the graduate level – when a person fails a test, it isn't the end of the program – it simply means they are required to study more, develop more – and sure enough – take the test again. That is very much the way it is in the Christian walk.

Some of us have probably heard someone say – “no one fails in God's school – we just keep taking the class over and over”. That's not very far from the reality of the Christian walk.

The silversmith and the goldsmith test the metal they plan to use to make jewelry or some vessel. They place the metal into a crucible and turn up the heat – they observe closely how the substance reacts to the heat. If the metal they place into the heat begins to flame up and turn colors – they realize that it still has some impurities in it – it isn't ready to be used to make precious things with just yet.

It is also important to note – that the silversmith nor the goldsmith leaves the metal in the furnace too long – and they don't allow the furnace to get too hot for that particular metal. You see, they don't want the metal damaged – just purified.

So while it is necessary to expose the metal to high heat – it is also important to make sure the heat isn't so high as to cause damage. Without the purification process – the gold or silver jewelry or vessel will not look as nice and it will not hold up as well.

James isn't the only one of the first century Christians to understand this principle – later Paul writes the same thing in his message to the Roman Christians.

Read Romans 5:3-4 and make notes:

Paul agrees with James – the sufferings (or trials) produce perseverance – our perseverance produces the maturity – character and eventually hope. This is what James calls “mature and complete”.

James was telling us very early in the Christian Church's existence – it isn't “more spiritual gifts” that we need – it isn't the bigger spiritual gifts that we need – but we need to develop maturity in the spiritual gifts that we have.

It isn't the quantity of the gifts or fruits that we have – it is the maturity – or the quality of the gifts and fruits that we have.

Temptations can be endured without falling. As we acquire spiritual knowledge, we find it easier to stand in faith. As we stand in faith, we find it easier to endure and to persevere.

James – 02 Count As Joy

The message from James is that when we find ourselves being tried and tested – this is a reason to rejoice – not rejoice because of the test itself – but rejoice because of the wholesome eventual effects the trials will produce.

In James 1:2, the Greek word translated “*trials*” is “*peirasmois*” - (pi-ras-mos’), which literally means – “an experiment, trial, proving.” Some translations have “temptations” instead of “trials” – and this word can be used in the sense of “an enticement to sin – or temptation.” But the more literal use of the word is in the sense of finding out the condition of a person or thing – and I do believe this is the context in which James uses the word – and so the translation to “trials” is more accurate than “temptation”

Of course – when we experience temptations – whether they be from some outside enticement to sin – or from our own inner attraction to some sin – we are indeed “tested” and “tried.” We do find out the condition of our faithfulness – the condition of our resolve to do the right thing – the condition or our ability to say “no” to sin.

So even if our translation has the word “temptation” – it is not entirely wrong – but I do believe “trials” gives us a much fuller picture of the message intended.

“Temptation” is a very narrow concept to most of us – we tend to think of temptation mostly as being enticed to do wrong by someone or something. “Trials” can include a much broader arena – “trials” can include the difficulties we face in our day to day walk – difficulties that come from within ourselves as well as those that come from outside sources. Trials can be from physical or psychological persecution – or they can simply be our inner temptations to sin.

It is also interesting to note that James did not say a particular trial is the cause for joy – he said the trials of “many kinds.” All of the trials we face are a source of pure joy – again, because of the result they will bring about within us.

The trials, while seldom pleasurable or enjoyable – contain the potential to develop within us “perseverance” – and this perseverance will bring us to maturity - and to completion as a Christian. The trials – the testing if you please – helps us discover whether our faith will endure or persevere.

If we discover our faith does not yet persevere or does not yet endure – then we know that we need to develop our faith a little more. And since we are told in Hebrews 11:6 that it is impossible to please God without faith – we do want to develop genuine faith – do we not ?

Since we want to develop genuine faith – then we want to have the “stick-to-it-ness” when the trials come. At the first trial or two, we probably don’t have the “stick-to-it” attitude or resolve – but as the trials come – we develop the ability to “stick-with-it.” And as we “stick-with-it” to the end – we find just how faithful God is – and this discovery develops a greater ability to stick-with-it when the next trial comes around. As this process continues, we develop genuine faith and confidence – and we become mature and complete in Christ Jesus.

James – 02 Count As Joy

In v4, the phrase “Perseverance must finish its work,” sounds like a something of a process of progress and development. So, we need to make sure that our understanding includes the concept that we do not become “mature” or “complete” Christians in one event. We do need to grasp the concept that to become a mature Christian is a process.

So, when we discover that we haven’t handled something as a mature Christian would do; instead of beating ourselves up because we failed to be a mature Christian; let the question be – “have I made progress in, or along, the process”? If we handled it “more” maturely than previously - Let’s give thanks for that, rather than condemning ourselves for not being fully mature yet.

Any and all testing that is allowed by God is for the purpose of accomplishing good in the Believer. Any and all testing that comes from Satan is intended to weaken, discourage, and damage the Believer, with the ultimate goal of destroying the Believer.

We need to ask ourselves, What is being accomplished by the testing? What is being accomplished by the trials we are experiencing? What is it about this text that we should try to apply to our daily life?

This joy is not some blind joy or ignorant joy. This joy is founded in a knowledge that the trial can accomplish more maturity in our Christ-likeness.

This joy is not only to be retrospective. This means it isn’t only that after the testing we are able to look back and see the good the testing accomplished. This joy is to be a prospective joy. This means that at the outset of the trial, we begin right then to see it as joy.

If we decide to wait until the testing is over and wait to see the good result, we may be feel more like crying. For sometimes, the testing reveals our weakness. The testing reveals that we need more growth in some area of faith or faithfulness. When we fail the trial, our flesh will want to hide and cry. But what we should do is see this as a very helpful thing.

As Believers, we really do want to become more like Christ - and very often don’t know what we need to do – or how we can become more like Christ. When we have a more mature view of the trials, we will understand that while we may have failed the trial, at least we now know where we need help, growth, maturity, strengthening. And that is a very good thing to know.

When the trial or testing begins, we can see this trial as “pure joy” – even before it comes to an end. For when this trial is over – I will either see that I have grown – or I will know where I need to grow. Either way, I win over the devil!

Please remember, it is our faith that is being tried and tested. It is our faith that is particularly precious to God. And it is our faith that is specifically obnoxious to Satan.

James – 02 Count As Joy

A trial of our faith where we overcome – brings honor to God and it brings defeat and disgust to Satan. Faith is the conquering principle – that is why Satan is so determined to weaken our faith and to show us just how weak our faith is. Satan fails to understand something important. When we discover where our faith is weak – we then know where to get help and where to work on strengthening our faith.

Satan's intention is to steal our joy, kill our hopes, and destroy our faith. God's intention is for us to increase our joy, bolster our hopes, and destroy the works of Satan with our faith.

What is our attitude Concerning the trials we are facing?

What are we allowing to be accomplished By these trials?

Write your thoughts or questions regarding this lesson and bring them with you to share with the group the next time we meet:

James – 03 Wisdom For Trials

The last lesson from James was to Believers facing trials. This lesson contains an offer from God to help those who are facing trials. In verse 4, we were assured that when perseverance had finished its work, we would lack none of the needed virtues to walk the walk or to live the life of faith. Beginning in verse 5, we have a message for those who are facing trials before perseverance has completed its work.

Read James 1:5 and make notes:

If we study the book of Proverbs in the O.T. - we discover there are 8 characteristics that are common to those who have wisdom. Proverbs also tells us there are 7 results that can be seen in the lives of those who have wisdom – and those with wisdom enjoy 6 benefits. These characteristics, results, and benefits are all things we would want to be a reality in our life.

From a number of references in the O.T. we find the concept that knowledge is obtained by study, observation, and applying oneself toward learning. But Wisdom is a gift from God. That is the O.T. concept of Wisdom.

This little verse in the book of James echoes the concept that wisdom is something that is given to us from our Heavenly Father – and if we discover we don't have wisdom, we should “ask God” for it.

The Greek word used here is in the present tense – and that indicates a “continuing” to ask – instead of having asked one time. James declares very simply that God “gives generously to ALL” and He does so without finding fault.

Before going further, maybe we should clarify the difference between knowledge and wisdom. “Knowledge” refers to the things we know – facts, figures, data – including formulas for calculating. “Wisdom” is understanding how to use the knowledge we have in the most beneficial way.

A person can have a great deal of knowledge – but if they are short on wisdom, they may not be able to use this knowledge in a constructive way. They may have difficulty making a living, they may have difficulty doing anything constructive.

A person who has an abundance of wisdom but a small amount of knowledge – may just accomplish more than the person with an abundance of knowledge and only a small amount of wisdom.

James – 03 Wisdom For Trials

Wisdom is the ability to make beneficial use of the knowledge. Perhaps you have met people who have memorized great portions of God’s Word. They know what God’s Word says, technically – but they lacked the wisdom in how to use the Scriptures they know. In their lack of wisdom, they often use God’s Word to condemn others, sometimes try to control others, and mostly try to manipulate others.

Knowledge is a good thing – and it is a beneficial thing when it is accompanied by wisdom. Wisdom makes the knowledge go further – accomplish more – in short, wisdom makes knowledge more fruitful.

The kind of wisdom a person needs, who is facing trials, isn’t speculative wisdom – and it isn’t the theoretical wisdom of some philosophical system. It is the kind of wisdom that can be used in the everyday things of life. It is the kind of wisdom that God gives a person to help them avoid the paths of wickedness – and to live a life of righteousness.

This kind of wisdom will help us understand both the nature and the purpose of the trial. This kind of wisdom is available to the one who will ask God for it. There is nothing in God or about God that will keep Him from giving it to those who ask for it.

The last half of this verse is so encouraging and uplifting – and it gets far too little press in today’s sermons. It tells us God gives wisdom generously to those who ask for it – and He does this without beating them up for their past sins – the sins we know we have committed or the sins that we aren’t aware we have committed.

Read Psalms 19:12-13 and make notes:

Psalms 19:12 is a cry for mercy and help - “who can be aware of each and every sin” - “so please God, forgive me of my unconscious sins”; and 19:13 goes on to plead – “keep me from willful sins as well.”

It is God’s practice to give generously to His children – without finding fault – and without scolding us for asking – and without belittling us for being deficient in our wisdom.

Read James 1:6 and make notes:

James – 03 Wisdom For Trials

It may be that most people who use v6 – use it as a reference on prayer – and that isn't a bad application – but we must not disconnect and separate v6 from v5. While there is nothing that prevents God from giving this wisdom - there may be a barrier that exists within His people that prevents us from receiving.

The Holy Spirit is trying to get a message across to Believers – and He is speaking this message through the pen of James right now – He starts out by saying “if you lack wisdom” – then “ask God” – and “when you ask, you must believe” and “you must not doubt.” When we ask God for wisdom, it is imperative that we believe God will give us the wisdom we ask for.

Read Hebrews 11:6 and make notes:

This teaching of James not only agrees with the teaching of Paul – it agrees with the teaching of Jesus. Just look at the times in Jesus' earthly ministry when Jesus said, “your faith has healed you” or “your faith has saved you.”

Jesus let it be known that our “believing” was very important – and that our “doubts” were very damaging. The person who doubts – either thinks God can not or that God will not grant what they have asked for.

Our faith must be something more than just acceptance of a religious creed. Our faith must be more of a confidence that God will give what we request from Him.

This kind of faith is expecting Him to actually do so. James says the one who “doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.” That's an interesting picture. If you have ever been on a boat on the sea during a storm, you noticed that the waves during a storm are not the cooperative rolling waves like those on which people surf - the waves being tossed by the wind is sometimes up and sometimes down – it sometimes moves one way then perhaps in the very next minute moves another way.

In v6 James speaks about “when he asks” – this means this is a person who believes in God. If he didn't believe in God, he wouldn't be asking God for something. So this is a word to those who are Believers – and the word is a caution for us not to be a “doubter”. The double-minded man is the one who in one breath says “I believe” and in the very next breath says, “I doubt.”

Read James 1:7-8 and make notes:

James – 03 Wisdom For Trials

“That man” is something of a derogatory phrase. The person who asks God for wisdom, then doubts – this person should not expect to “receive anything from the Lord.” For this person is “double-minded” – AND, he is “unstable in all he does”

As far back as the book of Genesis – in the account of the tower of Babel – God told us there is a great power in being single minded. God is the one who said “these people are all saying the same thing – there is nothing that will be impossible to them.”

The other side of that principle is that when we are not “single minded,” there is much that is impossible to us – maybe even everything is impossible.

I was on a boat once during a storm – the boat didn’t just rock left and right – it didn’t just rock forward and backward. That boat rocked in all kinds of directions, and it seemed to do so in a random manner. We could not tell which direction the boat was going rock next. It was impossible to move about on that boat. All we could do was to hold on to some part of the boat. One moment we would be up and the other part of the boat would be down – in the next minute we would be down and the other part of the boat would be up – the next minute we would going sideways – and this random movement went on until the storm died down.

That is why a “double-minded” man is said to be “unstable in all he does.” Being double-minded – they do not move in a consistent manner – you can never be sure what direction they might move in next.

We may find ourselves to be something like the man mentioned in Mark 9 – who stated “I believe; help me overcome my unbelief.” This is not the same as the double-minded man spoken of in James. The man in Mark was not wavering back and forth between belief and unbelief. He desired to believe – stated his belief – and then he asked for help in whatever area he might be inadequate in his faith. His desire was to have adequate and complete belief.

The man in Mark was not facing in two directions at the same time – he was simply acknowledging his struggle to face fully in the direction of faith – and was asking for help to do so. God responds to this kind of faith by granting wisdom to enable the believer to persevere in times of trials.

There are no doubt, many lessons concerning “wisdom for trials” that we can find in this text from James. Here are just a couple to consider:

#1. God is the source of wisdom.

God is the one to whom we should look to obtain wisdom. We need to be careful that we do not seek the wisdom of philosophers, astrologers, and the like. These people may actually attain some level of wisdom that can actually be of benefit in daily life. But the highest wisdom these people can attain – will always be extremely small in comparison to the wisdom of God.

James – 03 Wisdom For Trials

The wisdom of philosophers is never going to be in abundance. The wisdom of the philosopher is limited by the limitations of mankind. The wisdom of the philosopher, and of the human scientist, is subject to the flaws of human reason and the failings of human observation and human logic.

The wisdom of God on the other hand is limitless – and it is flawless. We don't need to ask God for perfect people – what we need is wise people. That's why the Holy Spirit spoke through James that we should ask God for wisdom if we want to be on top of the trials that come our way.

The basis for wisdom then is faith. The basis for wisdom is not that we have managed to live a perfect life. It isn't that we have managed not to sin. It is simply that we have come to the place of having faith that God will do what He says He will do.

Human logic and reasoning might tell us that we cannot ask God for anything – because we have sinned so often, or so severely. This is faulty reasoning – and it originates from Satan. Turn to the Lord with all your heart and ask Him for wisdom – and do not doubt that He will give you wisdom. This is the kind of faith that receives the bountiful outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

#2. Wisdom is Our Responsibility.

God is ready to give wisdom – but it is clearly stated that it is given to those “who asks.” It is our responsibility to ask for wisdom. Wisdom is not bestowed upon a person just because they have been a believer for a certain length of time. Wisdom is not bestowed upon a believer who does a certain type or amount of good works. Wisdom is given – and given generously – to the Believer who asks God for it.

For those who have been led to think – it is somehow being “over-spiritual” to be asking God for wisdom to handle earthly trials; please consider this: What would the wisdom of man told the Children of Israel to do – when they came up to the edge of the sea on foot – with the army of Pharaoh coming up fast behind them?

These people could not outrun on foot – the horse drawn chariots of Pharaoh's army. These civilian people could not ward off these trained soldiers. What would the wisdom of man have been?

The wisdom of God was for their leader to hold his rod over the water. And immediately there was a dry path for them to cross over to safety.

James – 03 Wisdom For Trials

Consider – What would the wisdom of man have told these people to do; after being slaves for about 10 generations - and then they come up against the heavily fortified city of Jericho. The walls of this city were too high to climb over - the walls were so thick that chariots ran around on the top of the walls. What would the wisdom of man have told these civilians to do against such a fortified city?

The wisdom of God told them to march around the city of Jericho in silence once each day for 6 days. Then to march around the city 7 times on the 7th day – then and only then to let out a shout. The walls went into the ground and they entered the city.

Consider – What would the wisdom of man have told these people to do when they were being over run by poisonous snakes?

The wisdom of God told them to make an image of a snake and to raise it high into the air. And all of those who looked toward the image of the snake when they were bitten were healed and did not die.

What would the wisdom of man say to do when a wedding banquet ran out of wine? What would man's wisdom say to do when you had fished all night and caught nothing?

There are so very many examples in the Bible, where God's wisdom looks nothing at all like man's wisdom. But God's wisdom is ALWAYS effective. Can we honestly say that about man's wisdom?

It isn't being overly spiritual to seek God's wisdom. Not only in the big and overwhelming trials we face, but also in every decision we make. Because God's wisdom is flawless. God's wisdom is successful. God's wisdom is safe and productive. ALWAYS!

Before you throw this lesson out – and complain that these examples were all miracles; please consider the answer to this question: “Would we be seeing more miracles today if we sought God's Wisdom in all things?”

What are some other lessons we can take from this text, that you think would be good to share with New Believers?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this lesson and bring with you to discuss with the group the next time we meet:

James – 04 Share The Same Pride

This lesson is very important for contemporary Christians. It refutes two lies that are commonly taught among God's people today. And it is an important message for any local church who is growing.

Before we get into the lesson, let's consider; if we had to choose: (1) Do we want to build a local church with a lot of people?; or (2) Do we want to build a local church which is spiritually healthy and effective for the cause of Christ?

Read James 1:9-10 and make notes:

The wording of this passage is very significant. And we need to take care not to follow after some of the mis-interpretations, or at least mis-applications, that are frequently applied to this text.

It is imperative that we recognize the word "brother" in regard to the person in "humble circumstances" as well as in regard to the person who is "rich". There are those who want to teach from this passage and claim the "rich" person is not a Believer. When we keep this verse in context with the rest of this chapter and the rest of this letter, that interpretation just isn't supportable.

This is a letter to Believers – the distinction is between a "brother" in humble circumstances and a "brother" who is rich. "One" is experiencing lowly circumstance and "one" is experiencing a high circumstance.

And we must not "spiritualize" this passage as some tend to do. James is talking about real life circumstances, not the spiritual "low" and the spiritual "rich".

The Greek word used here is one that speaks of social status – it is not the word that would be used to refer to a spiritually low state. The word used here and the way in which it is used refers to one who is in a humble physical, or socio-economic, state rather than one who is living out an attitude of humility.

Read James 1:11 and make notes:

Verse 10 spoke of wild flowers. It is recorded that in that part of the country – in the springtime it is not uncommon for a southeast wind that is very hot to begin blowing. This scorching wind can blow all day and all night without stop – and can last two or three days.

James – 04 Share The Same Pride

Wildflowers carpet the hillsides and make the hills appear as though some artist has painted them. They appear so colorful and full of life in the morning – but they wilt quickly and appear dead and dried up by the end of the day.

When these southeast winds blow across the landscape like a blast furnace. This analogy provided a clear picture for the people in James' day. They knew how quickly the wildflowers wilted away when these winds blew.

We should ask some questions of those who insist on using this text as comparing the poor Christian with the rich non-Christian. Do they want us to believe that real Christians cannot be wealthy? Do they want us to believe that only rich non-Christians fade away?

To take the passage in that direction cheats us out of the message God intended for Believers – and quite frankly it cheats us out of the message to be found in this marvelous letter written by James as he was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Again, it is important for us to keep in mind, that this letter is to Believers. The message includes this part that warns Believers not to be misguided by those that would have us believe either of two lies concerning earthly wealth.

One lie is that wealth is contrary to being a Christian, so if you want to be a real Christian you have to be poor. The second lie is that wealth is an insurance policy to prevent us from passing away.

Earthly wealth does not give or sustain life. We may hear some say that wealth at least makes life enjoyable. But that is not always true – wealth has made some people quite miserable – it has taken the joy out of their daily life.

I have personally experienced times of plenty and I have had times of not having enough. I will confess – I would rather have plenty than to not have enough. But I can also testify – worldly wealth is not the answer to our quest for happiness – and especially joy.

Some people seem to think of “rich man” as being somehow synonymous with a person who looks down upon the poor and takes advantage of them. Some seem to prefer to think of the “rich man” who despised Lazarus – and that is their picture of a “rich man”.

An honest evaluation of the story of Lazarus leaves us with the conclusion that this rich man was lost. For Christians, a better picture of a “rich man” would be Abraham, who was considered righteous because of his Faith in God.

Why don't Christians hold to the picture given in Malachi – of the person who has been faithful to bring all the tithes into the storehouse – and God fulfills His promise to open up the windows of heaven and pour out upon him a blessing so big that it is hard for him to contain it all? That is a far better picture of a rich man for the Christians.

James – 04 Share The Same Pride

Read Mark 12:42-43 and make notes:

The Bible, in several places, makes it clear that it is a heart issue and not a dollar amount issue. Following the statement that those who sow sparingly – reap sparingly; and those who sow generously – reap generously; look at what Paul said:

Read 2 Corinthians 9:7 and 9:11 and make notes:

The phrase “in every way” does not leave out any earthly wealth. The Holy Spirit over and over – through several different ministers – keeps telling us it is the attitude of our heart with which we give – and not the quantity or the frequency with which we give.

Some years ago, I met a wealthy man, who had one of the healthiest attitudes toward earthly riches I have seen. This man had accumulated considerable wealth. He owned a lot of real estate – he had a number of successful financial investments – and he had no debt. He lived in a fine home with a lake out front. He and his wife not only drove nice cars but they were always dressed well. He had all the things that most people equate with wealth.

After dinner at this house, I tried to compliment him on how well he had done with his investments and business. He said “thanks, but it really wasn’t right to congratulate him.” He said, “Others had worked just as hard, maybe some had worked harder – he was sure that the only reason he had done so well was that God had chosen to bless him – it really wasn’t that he had some superior abilities.”

He went on to say, “this piece of property doesn’t really belong to me – it belongs to the Lord. Before I came along God allowed someone else to put their name on it – right now God is allowing me to put my name on it - and after I die God will allow another person to put their name on it – but it always has and always will belong to God.”

He explained that he understood he was only a steward of all this while he was alive – he was simply taking care of God’s things – and God was allowing him and his wife to enjoy the benefits of it all while they were taking care of it.

Every Person in the Kingdom of God is Equal.

James – 04 Share The Same Pride

In James 1:9, the Believer in humble circumstances is told to take pride in his “high position”; and in James 1:10, the Believer who is rich is told to take pride in his “low position.” Both verses basically tell us – the poor Christian and the rich Christian should “take pride.”

Read Galatians 3:28 and make notes:

Did you catch that it says, we are “all one in Christ Jesus?” The word “all” leaves out or excludes no Believer in Jesus Christ. The word “one” leaves no place for there to be multiple kinds of Christians or multiple levels of Christians – we are “one” body of Christ.

The Believer who is lacking in worldly goods, is in actuality in a very high position as a child of the Living God – a King’s Kid. The Believer who is rich in worldly goods, is in actuality in a very low position in the Kingdom of God – a servant.

Believers should “take pride” in their position with the Lord. It is only our position in Jesus Christ that counts for anything. Nothing of this world is going with us when we go to live with our Father in Heaven.

Part of the message is that earthly wealth does not strengthen the spiritual man. Earthly wealth does not make one person better than another. Earthly wealth does not bring life or keep life.

Read 1 Timothy 6:17 and make notes:

The person rich in earthly wealth goes the same way as the person poor in earthly wealth. Both fade away. Both leave behind all earthly accomplishments. Both leave behind all earthly possessions. And Both take with them all the things they accomplished for the Kingdom of God. Both stand before God and are judged according to how obedient they were to the things God had asked them to do.

The Christian of humble means cannot use their lack of worldly goods as an excuse for not serving God and fellowshiping with others. The Christian of abundant worldly goods cannot use their abundance as an excuse not to fellowship with others or to serve God.

Riches can – and will – disappear much like the wild flowers. Someone you are near on a daily basis have probably either experienced it for themselves – or they have seen it in the lives of others. There isn’t anything on this earth that disappears as quickly and as easily as “earthly riches”.

James – 04 Share The Same Pride

The world's wealth is like a wild flower. It seems as though the very elements of the universe are out to steal it away – or to destroy it. And while the rich man can take certain measures to decrease the risk – there really isn't anything the rich man can do to guarantee the riches won't be destroyed.

Now, having said that about how fragile earthly wealth is – this passage isn't saying it is the worldly wealth of the rich person that fades. It is fairly common that a rich person dies and leaves considerable wealth behind. What we read in James 1:11 - “. . .In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.” What fades is the person, whether rich or poor in worldly goods. We fade away.

Read Luke 14:11 and make notes:

LOST PERSON:

The **lost poor** person looks at their position in life and sees themselves as a lowly person. Frequently thinking they are being taken advantage of by others. They feel despair at the prospect of having to live out their life in this low estate.

The **saved poor** person looks at their position in life and sees themselves as a King's Kid. Frequently thinking they are being given an opportunity to show their faithfulness to God by helping others with the little that they have. They feel excitement at the prospect of storing up treasure in Heaven where they will one day live with the Father for ever and ever.

The **saved poor** person realizes their true dignity is not connected to earthly things they do or do not possess. They realize their true dignity is that which has been given to them by having been given a place in the Kingdom of God.

The **lost rich** person looks at their position in life and sees themselves as better than most. Perhaps more intelligent, better breeding, more business savvy, etc. They feel a constant fear and worry at having to live their life on edge, on alert, on guard, because others are out to take their wealth from them.

RICH PERSON:

The **saved rich** person looks at their position in life and sees themselves as more blessed than most. They tend to recognize that others have worked as hard, and even as smart, as they have. Then feel honored to be blessed by God, knowing that they are a servant who has been entrusted to oversee God's goods. They are constantly listening to see if God wants them to give here or to give there.

James – 04 Share The Same Pride

The **saved rich** person realizes that true riches are those that are laid up in Heaven. These on earth are very temporary. The **rich saved** person realizes that they have no more permanent stay on this earth than does the poor saved person. The same fate awaits us all – the same standard will be applied to each of us at the judgment.

The physically poor who are being obedient to God need not see themselves as less. The physically rich who are being obedient to God need not see themselves as more.

The founding fathers of this nation we live in understood something of this principle. They were willing to put it into writing and then to sign their names to it. “We believe these truths to be self-evident. . . that all men are created equal.”

In the day that they put their names to that statement, every person didn't have the same amount of money. Every person didn't live in the same socio-economic circumstance. Every person didn't have a carriage – or even a horse. Nor did they expect every person to have the same things. They understood “equality” wasn't about having the same “stuff”!

So, perhaps Christians in this nation should be the last to treat other Christians as less or as more. As an individual – we must accept every Christian as an equal in God's kingdom. As a local church – we must accept everyone who is saved as our Brother or Sister.

There is no justification to see ourselves as less than any other Believer. And there simply is no place for an attitude of Elitism.

Can we honestly make this confession from our heart :

“We are one in the Spirit – We are one in the Lord. We pray that our unity – may this day be restored. For we know we are God's children - By our Love. We will all walk together - We will walk hand in hand. Together we'll share these blessings....God is in the land. We will work with each other - We will work side by side. And restore each one's dignity - By finding God inside. For we know we are God's children - By our Love, by our Love, Yes, we know we're God's children - By our Love.”

When we truly have this kind of unity – then nothing will be impossible to us. If we cannot say the above with an honest heart, then what do we need to do? What do we need to change?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this lesson and bring with you to discuss with the group the next time we meet:

James – 05 Temptation

Please don't disconnect the text for this lesson from those we have read in the previous lessons from James. Earlier in these lessons from James we were told to count the trials we face as "pure joy." And then we were told that we could receive Wisdom for these trials. In the last lesson from James we were told there is no difference between the poor Christian and the rich Christian.

In this lesson, we go back to talking about trials. James did not stop the message the Holy Spirit was dictating to him about trials – and throw in the part about the poor and the rich being the same – and then get back to the message from the Holy Spirit.

It is true that we can make an argument that the poor Christians face some trials that the rich Christians don't – and the reverse is true – and we must admit there are some trials that are common to man. Even if it isn't the same trial – the fact remains that all Believers face trials – whether rich or poor – regardless of physical stature – social standing – or relationships – we will face situations and circumstances that will test our resolve to live out the life we claim to have in Christ Jesus.

So, to get the full impact of this lesson in James, we must NOT dis-connect this message from the others in James.

Read James 1:12 and make notes:

There are those who break this verse down as having 3 points:

- .1. "Blessed" is the man who perseveres under trial
- .2. the person who withstands the test will receive a crown of life
- .3. God has promised to give a crown of life to those who love Him.

If we read this verse quickly, it certainly can sound like this. But, when we look closely at this breakdown, it sounds like "enduring the trial" is another qualification to salvation – or at least to receiving a crown. When we stop and think carefully – considering "all" of God's Word – we remember the condition of salvation does not include being able to endure trials.

We are saved by Grace through Faith! It is believing with the heart that God has raised Jesus from the dead and confessing with the mouth that Jesus is Lord. Enduring the trial isn't part of the qualification for receiving the crown.

There is another application to this verse – one I believe is the more correct application. In the culture of that day – every person who was a winner in one of the contest or games – such as the Greek games from which our modern day Olympics came – each winner received a crown. They could and would wear this crown out in public.

James – 05 Temptation

Paul wrote, in the games and races that were held in that society – only one person received the winners crown – or the prize. Paul then explained how it was different for Christians – for in the kingdom of God, each Believer is seen by God as a winner – each Believer will receive the prize.

God blesses those who stand up under temptation – God blesses those who stand up under the things that try to get a person to give up – or fall into despair – or to respond with evil.

Read James 1:13 and make notes:

This verse reads like James doesn't have much sympathy for those who are trying to blame God for their being tempted. We're not going to get into the argument about "testing" vs. "tempted" – and we are not going to get into the debate about God allowing people to go into places where they are tempted"

This passage is not talking so much about being "tested" to see what we are made of. This passage is clearly talking about being "tempted" by evil – in other words being tempted to do evil – or to participate in evil. God is immune to temptation by evil – God cannot be tempted by evil – AND GOD DOES NOT tempt anyone – to do evil.

Christians – Do not Accuse God Of Tempting You – when you feel tempted.

Without doubt, each of us is tempted to do something wrong from time to time – but it isn't God who is tempting us when we are experiencing temptation.

Read James 1:14 and make notes:

This is one of those "tough" verses. In the previous verse, James is quite clear that it isn't acceptable to blame God when we are being tempted. In this verse, James says he isn't going to accept us blaming the devil every time we feel tempted – he just flat out says, "we are tempted by our own evil desire" – Ouch ! The flesh tends to have an attitude that is similar to: "Lord, Have mercy – surely I don't have to blame me – please Lord, show me who I can blame for being tempted."

Referring back just for a second to the previous verse – God cannot be tempted by evil. Now looking at this verse – we are tempted by our own evil desires. There it is – that's why God cannot be tempted by evil – God doesn't have evil desires.

James – 05 Temptation

Human beings on the other hand – we are born into a fallen world. We live in a fallen environment – we do – everyone of us – has some evil desires. “Desires” are not bad things. It is the evil desires that are bad – and we all have at least one!

It is only when we allow our evil desire to control us – it does the dragging away – then we find ourselves being tempted. If we would keep control of ourselves – and refuse to allow our evil desire to drag us anywhere – we would not be tempted.

Read James 1:15 and make notes:

When “desire” conceives, “sin” is the fruit! Please don’t go astray with your thinking – but do consider this quick analogy. If un-married people would refrain from committing fornication – there would never be a even one child born out of marriage. Because conception would never take place if the fornication did not take place. If no baby is conceived then no baby will be born.

No, this lesson is not taking a turn and becoming one about children being born out of marriage. But do hold onto this analogy for a few minutes. If you and I would refrain from allowing our evil desire to take control – it could never drag us anywhere. And if our evil desire could not take us any place – then sin would never be conceived within us. If we did not conceive sin – we would not give birth to sin. If we never gave birth to sin – then the sin could not become mature within our life – and if sin could not become mature – then sin could not bear fruit in our life.

When sin matures, it always brings forth death. If evil desires ever are allowed to conceive – it will conceive sin. Evil desires never conceive anything but sin. The result – the fruit of sin – is death. Sin never produces any other kind of fruit – let me say it again - the fruit of sin is always death. And sin is the offspring of evil desires.

If we allow our evil desire to drag us away – our evil desire will conceive. Our evil desire always conceives sin. If we allow this to mature, then our sin will produce fruit.

Sin produces one thing only – DEATH !

Sin produces death of relationships.

Sin produces death of families.

Sin produces career death.

Sin produces emotional death.

Sin produces physical death.

Etc.

James – 05 Temptation

A wide range of areas indeed – but always death. Did you notice – evil desires must conceive before they can give birth to sin? But sin doesn't have to conceive – sin bears fruit when it matures! We have to engage – or participate with - our evil desires to produce sin. But sin only needs to mature in order to bring forth death in our lives.

Read James 1:16-17 and make notes:

Some want to argue, not every “good” gift necessarily comes from God. Claiming that some “good” gifts can come from other people. This fails to recognize the scriptures that state, there is no good thing within ourselves.

Read Psalm 16:2 and make notes:

If we find a “good” thing within us – or that we indeed have a “good” thing – then it has ultimately come from God. While it may have come through someone else – it originally came from God.

Apart from God, we have no good thing! So “every good gift” is from God – “every perfect gift” is from God – “every good gift” comes down from the Father of the heavenly lights – “every perfect gift” comes down from the Father of the heavenly lights.

God does not change like the “shifting shadows” of this world. The shadows of this world are constantly changing. They “shift” continuously throughout the day. As the sun moves, so does the shadow. God is the same – all they time – every day – all day long – and throughout the night. Since God is unchanging, He is always bringing Good Gifts!

Now we certainly can take verse 16 & 17 – and make a wonderful sermon based upon the statements here – but let's not disconnect these verses from the rest of this letter. James is talking to Believers. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he is trying to give us something to help us when we find ourselves being faced with trials, test, and temptations.

He stated we should keep in mind that we are not tempted by God to sin. The truth is that we find ourselves tempted to sin by our own evil desires. Believers, don't be deceived, “every good and perfect gift” comes from God – and He does not change.

James – 05 Temptation

When we find ourselves being tested, tried, or tempted - if something or someone comes along that helps us resist giving in to the temptation – would we call that thing or that person a “good gift” or a “bad gift”? We certainly would call this a “good gift”. Every time we have something or someone who helps us resist sin – then we have been given a “good gift” and it has ultimately been given to us by our Father in Heaven.

We need to stop being deceived – God is not the giver of temptation. God is the giver of good gifts.

Some of us have received a “good gift” in the form of a life partner that helps us resist the evil desires within us. Some of us have received a “good gift” in the form of a friend that helps us resist the evil desires within us. Some of us have received a “good gift” in the form of a medicine that helps us resist the evil desires within us. And the list of “good gifts” can become quite long. The point being that everything and everyone that helps us resist the evil desires within – this is a “good gift” from God in Heaven. Let us give thanks to our Father in Heaven – who has given us “good gifts”.

Read James 1:18 and make notes:

“He chose to give us birth through the word of truth.” How was man created in the beginning ?

Read John 1:1-3 & John 14:6 and make notes:

Jesus is called “the Word” and Jesus calls Himself “the Truth.” In the very beginning, man was created by the “Word of Truth” – and that is the origin of our species.

When mankind was created – it was so that we could be a “kind of first fruits of all God created.” And when we discover we are “lost” from our original purpose – we have become dead to the God-Man relationship.

How fitting it is that the way of our being “born again” is by a re-birth in the “word of truth”? Wow! God “chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.”

James – 05 Temptation

Before we believe too many of the lies about how God isn't going to forgive – or God isn't going to cleanse me - because of the things I have done or said – Be sure to remember God's original purpose – and then consider God's plan to bring us back into relationship with Him. It doesn't sound like He would be so quick to exclude anyone now does it?

The same God who has no evil desires – the same God who Himself cannot be tempted to do evil – the same God who never – ever – tempts anyone to do evil: This is the same God who created mankind to have fellowship with him. And it is the same God who created a way for fallen man to be restored to fellowship with Him. That is why there is no sin and no failure too big or too serious to keep us from receiving Forgiveness – cleansing – and Salvation.

Read James 1:19 and makes notes:

James gives some very practical – right where we live and work – instructions as to how we can best handle – times of testing – times of trial – and especially times of temptation.

- . “be quick to listen” –
- . “be slow to speak” –
- . and “be slow to become angry”

Until we are willing to listen in the first place – it might be difficult to “be quick to listen.” The “slow to speak” thing is greatly needed among Church People today.

Have you noticed – how often one Believer interrupts another Believer when they are speaking? We are so quick to speak that we can't even wait for the other person to finish.

“Being slow to speak” is a good practice at all times - it is even considered to be “good manners.” But “Being slow to speak” is of the greatest importance when we are being tried or tested. And remember, this first part of the letter of James, is about Believers being tempted, tried, and tested. Maybe we should start making an effort to “Be slow to become angry.”

Read James 1:20 and make notes:

James – 05 Temptation

The fact that we do not make good decisions when we are angry is so well documented; surely no one will argue against it. Especially in the times when we are being tested or tried – especially when we are being tempted to do the wrong thing – “oh, how important it is for us to refrain from getting angry.” Once we get angry, we can no longer make good decisions – and we are more likely to move into sin. If we can resist getting angry – then we can make better decisions – and we will be much less likely to move into sin. If we can refrain from becoming angry – we are much less likely to allow our evil desires to conceive sin.

Read James 1:21 and make notes:

If we want to keep things in the proper context – then we need to draw a line along the margin of our Bible and connect v21 with verses 13&14. Since we are tempted by our own evil desires – since it is when we give way to our own evil desires – since it is when we allow our own evil desires to drag us away – that we sin. “THEREFORE” - “get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent.”

Two very practical things here that will help us to be more successful in our times of trial.

- .1. get rid of all moral filth
- .2. get rid of the evil that is so prevalent

If we want to stand successfully in our times of trial. If we want to endure the testing. There are two things we need to do:

The first thing:

- let’s get rid of the moral filth in our home –
- let’s get rid of the moral filth in our work space –
- let’s get rid of the moral filth in our car –

This can be in the form of books, magazines, videos, and the like. Let’s make our environment one that builds up and edifies. And we cannot do this in the midst of moral filth!

The second thing:

Let's get rid of “the evil that is so prevalent.”

“The evil that is so prevalent” may be something different for each of us – because Satan is so very good at identifying our weak spots. He tends to make sure that each of us is surrounded by the evil that most torment us.

That is why the “evil that is so prevalent” is likely to be different for different people. But if we will stop trying to appear so piously lofty – then we can acknowledge that there is some evil that is very prevalent in and around our life.

James – 05 Temptation

Every generation has been under assault by Satan. Every generation has been tempted. I can't image a generation who has lived with evil as prevalent as our current society. With our technical ability to transmit information and images through the airwaves – with the use of the internet - there just hasn't been a generation so surrounded with evil potential as ours.

It isn't simply a matter that we will enjoy the revival and outpouring of God's presence and His Spirit – that is in the ready mode to be poured out upon us. Our nation is in serious danger. For the safety and for the future health of this nation – God's people have got to get serious about our lifestyles – our standards – and teaching the importance of this lifestyle to others.

The “fire” of manifestations of the Holy Spirit – can only come after the “fire” that cleanses and purifies has come. The plea found in this letter of James is so relevant to our contemporary society. Let's “get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you.”

It was by the “Word of Truth” that mankind was originally created. It is only by the “Word of Truth” that anyone can anyone find hope to be restored to God. And the “Word of Truth” simply isn't going to reside in nasty – filthy – vessels.

My Hope – Your Hope – and the Only Hope the people around us have – is to hear and to receive the Word of Truth. Will I be a vessel to carry the Word of Truth to those around me? Will I get rid of those things that are making me unclean and unfit for the Word of Truth? Will I offer myself to God to be cleansed from the stains in my heart, my mind, and my life that are there as a result of my past evil desires?

If I want revival - I will! If I want a fresh outpouring of God's presence - I will! So, what changes or adjustments do I need to make to my daily life?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this lesson and bring them with you to discuss with the group the next time we meet:

James – 06 Live Your Profession

Please keep in mind – James is writing as the Holy Spirit is directing him – and he is giving instructions on how we can “stand strong” in the face of temptations and trials.

Read James 1:22 and make notes:

In the KJV translation this verse is “be ye doers of the Word.” Neither that translation or the NIV – fully convey the meaning of the original Greek version. The original phrase in this verse uses a continuative sense verb. In other words, the original language said we should “keep on doing” - or that we should “continually do” what the Word says we should do.

Before you fall prey to the antagonism of Satan and start thinking this is just being nit-picky - I can't accurately give you a number to express how often I hear someone say, “I did what the Bible says and it just doesn't work!”

People will say something like this about a great range of things the Bible has to say. I have to point out that it is difficult to find a passage of the Bible that says if you do this or that – then in a certain number of days – or weeks – or months – this or that will result. What the Word of God gives us is instruction on how to live everyday – all the time – in every situation – and in every circumstance – and what it assures us is that it will – maybe only in the long run in some cases – but it will prove to be the better way – the successful way – and the way of life – and the way of joy.

So if we want to stand successfully during our times of temptation and our times of trials, then we need to keep on doing what the Word of God says we should do.

Having said that, let's look at the first part of this verse – “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.” Any teacher, instructor, or professor – if they teach long enough – will experience those who deceive themselves – by thinking they only have to show up – they don't have to pay attention – and they don't have to participate in the class.

Years ago, I made a decision that I would not perform another wedding ceremony for a couple – unless they participated in pre-marital counseling. It would probably surprise some of you – but over the years of providing pre-marital counseling – I have had several couples where one or both thought all they had to do was to show up and sit through the session. They acted surprised when I explained they actually are expected to “participate” in the sessions – there is homework – there are things they at least have to try – and at least 3 different couples have become angry at me for expecting participation on their part.

James – 06 Live Your Profession

One day I went into one of the businesses in town – I overheard a young man talking – he was upset because one of the professors at the college was giving him a “Failing” grade in the class that professor taught. This young man was saying that just isn’t right – he said “I don’t pay money for a class just to Fail – and besides, how can he give me a Failing grade when I didn’t even show up for any of his classes.” He went on for a minute or two about how he can’t give him an Failing grade for not showing up – he should only get a Failing grade if he “took test and failed it or something.”

Do you find it odd that a professor would actually expect the students to participate in the class? If you don’t show up – you fail the class. If you don’t participate – you fail the class. If you don’t do the things that are taught in the class – you fail the class. Is this concept too difficult to grasp? Of course not, So why do we approach the Word of God with a similar attitude?

Christians must do something more than just show up for church from time to time. We must do something more than just read a little Bible from time to time. If we want to stand successfully through the trying times – we must do what the Word of God tells us to do. And we must keep on doing what it says to do.

Read James 1:23-24 and make notes:

Let me point out – there are those who are present when the Word of God is taught or preached – but they don’t “listen.” So, let’s be generous and not slam this over the head of every person who is present in church.

This is a rather harsh point James makes with these 2 verses! What kinds of negative images do we apply to a person who would forget what they look like? Would we think this person is deficient mentally? Would we think this person has experienced some kind of brain damage? What would we think of the person – who looking at their reflection in a mirror – would say that they don’t recognize that person – they don’t remember that this is what they look like – what would we think?

This would cause concerns – if the person can’t remember what they look like – what other things are they going to forget? Would we want a person like this working with us – or working for us? Wouldn’t we be concerned that the next thing they forget would be something that would cause us harm. We certainly wouldn’t think this would be a normal or healthy person would we?

Here’s the short translation of what James says here: if we listen to the Word of God and then we don’t do what it says – the most kind thing we can say about us is that we are not healthy. At the very least, there is something wrong with us.

James – 06 Live Your Profession

And the “not doing” of the things the Word of God has told us to do – well it opens us up to harm and damage and pain and loss. And while it does apply to the things spiritual - it also applies to things natural. When we don’t live our life - doing the things God’s Word instructs us to do – we will experience damage and pain in the natural as well as in the spiritual.

Read James 1:25 and make notes:

This isn’t just talking about spiritual blessings in the sweet by and by. This is talking about - when we “continue to do” what the Word says - we will be blessed in what we do right here on this earth.

It is true that it is the desire of God’s heart that every person on earth would be saved – but it is also God’s desire that every one of us who are saved would also be blessed in everything we do. God wants us to be blessed. God wants help us to prosper - in all the things we put our hands to.

And the way this comes about is for us to do what God’s Word says in every area of our life – continuously. And if we don’t live out the Word of God that we have heard – we have deceived ourselves – and it will cost us.

Did you notice the difference in this verse from v23? In v23 the person is said to “look” at their reflection and then to go away. Here in v25 it speaks of the person who “looks intently” into the perfect law – this “looking intently” is certainly speaking of something more than a glance – it is something more than a prolonged stare – this is much more like the person who won’t take their eyes off of it – they keep on looking at it .

Did you not notice that it says “and continues to do this”? So if we want to be blessed in all that we do, we need to be sure that we are continually “looking” at God’s Word. This is not so different from the person who is continually referring to the manual – or instruction book – while they are performing a task.

This is not a strange concept to the great majority of us. It is like the parent who is doing some task around the house – either inside or outside – and the children are playing. This parent continually keeps a watchful eye on the children while they are busy performing the task. While it may be necessary to look away from the children for a moment – they are quick to turn their eyes back to the children – they never allow the children to get out of their sight – they know what the children are doing every moment.

It is this same concept James is talking about here. It is the person who never stops looking to the Word of God to make sure what they are doing – lines up with what the Word of God is saying. Continually – looking intently – at God’s Word!

James – 06 Live Your Profession

Read James 1:26 and make notes:

What kind of person might consider themselves to be religious? Maybe it's the person who regularly fasts – maybe they regularly give offerings – maybe they regularly attend worship services. They seem to do all the things that everyone in the community considers to be the things that a Christian would do.

In these last 2 verses of chapter 1 – James throws out a couple of sharp points. James has already pointed out that a person who listens to the Word of God, but does not live according to the Word of God – has deceived themselves.

Now James throws in this little barb – if we think we are a religious person – if we think we are pious in our actions – but we go around saying hurtful things, slanderous things – things that tear down rather than build up – things that discourage and belittle rather than things that encourage and strengthen – Simply put – whatever religion it is that we have – it is worthless.

For our religion to have value – we must keep a tight rein on our tongues. Before we allow our tongue to go in a particular direction – we need to make sure we have thought this through. We make our tongue go where we want it to go – rather than allowing our tongue to go wherever it wants to go – that's having a tight rein on our tongue.

To be doing the works of Christianity – but to fail to control the way we talk to and about others – then our Christianity is only a sham. This is an attempt at “identity theft” – and this is by far the most deadly type of identity theft.

In the natural – or physical sense – if we should steal the identity of another person – if we don't get caught – we may ruin the other person's reputation – their credit – etc. And if we do get caught we may have to spend some time in jail or pay a fine. And some seem to think the potential physical gain is worth the potential physical punishment.

But in this spiritual “identity theft” where we attempt to still the identity of a Christian – while we continue to be in reality – a non-Christian – then we are placing ourselves into position to experience torment for ever and ever. And this is a good place to say, “We always get caught!”. There is no rational person who would ever say this is worth the risk.

Every Christian needs to take care that we never become guilty of spiritual identity theft. We need to be a real Christian rather than a pretend Christian. And if you are not saved already – if you think you are saved but you aren't sure – then make today the day you can be sure – or the day you get saved!

James – 06 Live Your Profession

Read James 1:27 and make notes:

There are those who have read this verse and have drawn the conclusion that Christianity can be simplified to nothing more than looking after orphans and widows. Regardless of whatever else we do – if we take care of orphans and widows then we are living the Christian life successfully.

Three very important things must be pointed out in order that we do not pervert this text.

First:

This passage began as help for us to stand successfully through times of temptation and trial. So, whatever little things are pointed out in this passage, it is in some way connected with helping us to be able to withstand temptations and trials.

Second:

The “looking after orphans and widows” is not the ultimate in living a Christian life – it is the minimum. And what’s more, it really wasn’t meant to say that caring for orphans and widows is the Christian purpose – it was talking about the part of Christianity that would have us “doing” good for others. Not only orphans and widows, but any person who is hurting or struggling – we should take our cue from the good Samaritan. The Christian life is about laying down our life for our friends and neighbors.

Third:

Doing good works isn’t enough to meet God’s plan for us as Christians – it also includes keeping ourselves from being polluted by the world. How do we keep ourselves from being polluted by the world – we stand triumphantly through the times of temptation to do evil – we stand strong through the trials. And if we merely listen to God’s Word – and don’t try to live God’s Word out in our careers, families, and recreation – we are deceiving ourselves – and we will not be able to stand.

Do we truly want to receive the fresh outpouring of God’s Presence and the fresh outpouring of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit? Then we must do our best to live out the Word of God that we have heard. We must not merely listen to God’s Word – but we must continuously “do” God’s Word. If we want to sum up this portion of the book of James – it would be something like this: Put into practice what you profess to believe.

James – 06 Live Your Profession

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this lesson and bring with you to discuss with the group the next time we meet:

James – 07 Show No Favoritism

The opening statement of this passage from James is so clear and stated so simply that it would appear to require very little commentary or explanation. And it connects with chapter 1 – verses 9 & 10.

Read James 2:1 and make notes:

This passage is addressed to Brothers and Sisters. In other words it is addressed to Believers in Jesus Christ – to Christians. And the message is this: Don't Show favoritism.

We all understand what favoritism is. This is when we give more attention to one person than we do another. Favoritism is when we give one person better service than we do another. This is when we charge one person differently than we do another.

In the business world – there are situations where a certain amount of favoritism appears to be a good business practice. It is accepted business practice to give a lower price per unit to a customer who purchases large quantities than to the customer who purchases one or two of the item.

It is considered to be a good business practice to give a discount to a customer who will pay in just a few days instead of those who take several months to pay. It is when a person will sell land for a less amount per acre to someone who purchases 1000 acres than to the person who purchases 1 or 2 acres.

Things like this are a type of "favortisim" – and most of us understand why a business would do these things – and generally we accept them as being good business. But James starts this passage with the clear instruction to "show no favoritism". So, at least in James' mind – at the leading of the Holy Spirit – Favoritism within the body of Christ is not a good thing.

Read James 2:2 and make notes:

As we read the rest of this passage – it seems clear, James does not condemn the kinds of practices in the business world described above. James is talking about our church services, our fellowships, our ministry times.

James – 07 Show No Favoritism

James uses as an example, “a man comes into your meeting”. This could be a meeting in our home – many of the early church meetings took place in someone’s home. This could be a meeting in one of the public facilities. This could be a meeting in our local church facility. One person is described as entering the meeting and they are very well dressed. The other person who enters the meeting is described as being dressed “shabby”.

Read James 2:3-4 and make notes:

Please notice this closing statement – “become judges with evil thoughts.” In Chapter One of this letter – the emphasis was upon our standing strong against the temptation to engage in evil thoughts. Here, at the beginning of chapter 2, we are told that to show favoritism based upon socio-economic status is to engage in “evil thoughts.”

Again, lets remind ourselves that this letter is addressed to Believers – so this is talking to and about people who claim to be representing the Lord Jesus Christ – and then they are said to be having “evil thoughts”. Surely most of us would agree – we can’t be considered to be a good representative of Jesus Christ, if we are going about our life with evil thoughts.

Perhaps there are some who think this doesn’t really apply to us today. But it does – let me share with you why it is relevant today. In the days when this letter was written – it appears they had “best seats”, “better seats”, and just “regular seats”, and then they had “sit on the floor space”.

In today’s churches in this country, for the most part, we don’t have different seats. Again, I say for the most part, in the majority of churches today, the meeting room – the sanctuary if you please - generally has the same chairs –or the same pews throughout. For the most part, in the average church in this country a person can come in and sit pretty much wherever they want to.

I did find some interesting contradictions to this passage in the church I grew up in and in a number of churches I served in as a young adult. In the church I grew up in, everyone in the congregation sat in a pew. While it had a small pad in the seat, it had no pad in the back. I can remember a number of times in the summer when it would get hot, the back of my shirt would get sweaty leaning back on the pew. And yet, the pastor sat in a large chair with a much thicker cushion in the seat and a very nice pad on the back of the chair.

I also noticed, that when a visiting minister was there to preach – they didn’t always sit in the same place. If it was a well respected minister – they got to sit in that nice big chair up front. If they were not well known – if they hadn’t been sufficiently proven – they got to sit on the front row pew until it was time for them to come up. Do you think that was some kind of favoritism?

James – 07 Show No Favoritism

My wife and I were in a church some years ago. Our children were toddlers – they had not started school. One Sunday a young family visited our church. The man and woman and their several children found a pew and sat down. My wife and I both welcomed them and told how glad we were that they were visiting with us. Just as we were leaving the visiting family – a man came up to this family and told them they would have to move – that is where he always sits. They laughed – he then told them he was serious – so they moved – and they never came back to the church.

The man who did this was a man who never missed a church service. He was now a senior citizen. He grew up in that church. He had been sitting in that particular place on that particular pew for many years. Do you think, he had some form of favoritism?

There are a number of other examples I can share from past church experiences but for the sake of time I won't do that. But the point is fairly simple – the message in the book of James is very relevant today – it is very much needed by today's church congregations and church families.

Read James 2:5 and make notes:

Not every rich person is a bad person and this verse certainly does not say that. We have Joseph of Arimathea in the New Testament who was the one who put his own life in jeopardy to go before Caesar and asked for the body of Jesus when he was crucified. He also provided the new and never before used tomb in which Jesus' body could be placed. There are other rich people mentioned in the Bible who were very good people. So don't extend and generalize this to say all rich people are bad.

Not every poor person is saved – not every poor person is going to inherit the kingdom. From Jesus' conception, to the people who were first told of his birth, to the family he was raised with, to the people who first saw him resurrected – it should be clear that God never excluded those who are poor in worldly goods. But no where in the Scriptures does it say that being poor is a qualification to being saved – certainly not a guaranteed Salvation Ticket. So don't extend and generalize this to say that all poor people are inheriting the kingdom of God.

We can find stingy, greedy, ruthless, abusive people among those who are poor as well as those who are rich. We find generous, giving, helping, caring people among the poor as well as the rich. And while it is easy to find some notably snobbish people among the ranks of the rich – I have to admit that I have encountered more unhealthy Pride among the ranks of the poor than I ever have among the rich. Some of the most Proudful people I have ever met were among the ranks of the poor.

James – 07 Show No Favoritism

The short version is this: all of these bad traits, these evil actions, etc – they are all characteristics of human beings who are being led by their physical yearnings and tendencies. All of these good traits, the godly actions, etc – are all characteristics of human beings who are looking to God for their guidance. None of these traits or characteristics have anything to do with wealth or the lack of it. A person is not abusive to others because they are rich. A person does not steal because they are poor. The things we say – the things we do – and the way we treat others – it is simply a result of the condition of our heart!

Read James 2:6-7 and make notes:

As mentioned in regards to an earlier verse – it was not every rich person in that day that was exploiting the Christians. It wasn't every rich person that was dragging them into court. The point being made is that it wasn't the poor people who were abusing the Christians – it was the rich persons who were in places of religious leadership.

James was pointing out that it doesn't seem to make much sense – that you would go out and show favoritism to the rich over the poor – when it is those who are among the ranks of the rich who are persecuting you. And again, it would be a mistake to think every Jewish leader who was rich was in this particular mindset.

When the disciples were being threatened by the members of the Sanhedrin – it was one of those wealthy members of the Sanhedrin that cautioned the others to be careful – and told the whole group that these men might in fact be doing the will of God.

Read James 2:8 and make notes:

This statement lets us know that James does not think every Believer – in every local congregation is guilty of showing favoritism. Here James points out “If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture - Love your neighbor as yourself” – then you are doing what is right.

Because, if you are “loving your neighbor as yourself” you are not showing favoritism. And if you are showing favoritism – then you are not loving your neighbor as yourself – this is especially true regarding the neighbor you showed the lower favor towards. So, for those Believers who are acting toward others the way they would treat themselves – these Believers are doing right.

James – 07 Show No Favoritism

Satan wants us to think this is such a simple principle that we can just move on quickly – maybe even ignore it – after all, we are so much more mature than this – aren't we. Before we leave this simple thought – let's hold up the Bible Screen and see how our life looks against this screen.

When we need something – what quality of that item do we purchase for ourselves? And then, when we hear that someone else needs this item and we decide to help – what quality of this item do we purchase for them?

If we were to purchase something as basic as toilet paper – what quality of toilet paper do we buy for our home? If we decided to help purchase toilet paper for a family in need – what quality of toilet paper would we buy for them? Food items – bed linens – towels – clothing – do we love the other person in such a manner that we will only provide them with the cheapest – while we buy for ourselves the better? If so, then we are guilty of showing favoritism. And we are not “loving our neighbor as we love ourselves” !

Read James 2:9 and make notes:

If it were not for this letter of James – I'm not sure I would ever equate showing favoritism with “breaking the law” or with “sin.” And maybe that is not as accurate as it should be in what James is saying under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The phrase “you sin” in the original Greek says literally “you are working sin.”

This is much like “working dough” when one is making homemade bread. In order to have good homemade bread – it is necessary to “work the dough” – it must be sufficiently pulled – pushed – stirred. The ingredients must be thoroughly mixed together – but they must have time to “react” with one another – the ingredients must have time to “change” and “affect” one another. If you just put all the ingredients for bread together – but you don't work them properly – you won't get the light tender bread. It just sort of stays flat – and may not even be usable.

Even if it “rises” like good bread should do – it won't rise evenly – so our bread, if just left to itself, and not “worked” – will most likely turn out very lopsided – and lacking the texture and tenderness we desire in our bread.

James is saying “if we show favoritism” then we are “working sin” – this will cause the ingredients of our life to react with sin – and it will cause the ingredients of our life to be “changed” and “affected” by sin.

James – 07 Show No Favoritism

Can anyone guess how sin changes things in our life? If we work the sin into our life – it will permeate all the other ingredients of our life. If we work the sin into our life – it will puff up and get bigger. We will not grow and mature in a balanced and even manner. We won't have the tenderness, texture, or quality that most of us profess that we desire to have.

Read James 2:10-11 and make notes:

There are those who want to take exception with this part of the passage. They claim they just can't see the simple act of showing favoritism to certain people as being on the same plane as murder, adultery, or lying.

The people who start down this path of argument have failed to hear the words of Jesus. He is the one who said the "whole law" is summed up in loving God with all you are and all you have and to love others as yourself.

The only way one can follow this line of argument is to ignore the simple principle that showing favoritism is not loving all the other people as we love ourselves. And to fail to love others as we love ourselves is breaking the "sum of the law".

The argument is like saying "well I might have committed adultery, but at least I didn't murder anyone". That person is trying to say that their sin of adultery isn't as bad as the other person's sin of murder. We all understand this is not a valid argument, because in God's eyes sin is sin and it is all punishable with death. To say "well I might be showing favoritism, but at least I don't commit adultery" is the same invalid argument.

To show favoritism is the breaking of the law for Christians.

Read James 2:12-13 and make notes:

As Christian, when we speak to others – we must do so as if they are our equal. We must not show favoritism in our conversation and speak to some kindly and lovingly – while we speak to others with harshness. As Christians, our actions toward others must be without favoritism. We must treat all others the same.

James – 07 Show No Favoritism

The warning is stern – if we do not show mercy to others we stand in danger of receiving judgment without mercy. This is much more scary than it first appears.

We live in a great nation. Our legal system is perhaps the best in the world at this time. Yes, there are many corrupt people peppered throughout our legal system – but they are in every part of our society. On the whole, we have great laws. But even if we take one of the best laws we have – and make sure it is always applied to each person in the strictest sense – there will be those situations where someone is likely to be punished and it will not be equitable.

There are many laws, when read and applied in the strictest sense of what they say, can be unfair and can punish the wrong person. Most of our laws – must be administered in the environment of the original intent of that law. That’s where mercy comes in.

There probably is not one person in our congregation that would want to be judged by the law without having mercy applied. I beg of you, Please don’t judge me according to the strict and pure application of any law. Where God’s laws are concerned as well as where man’s laws are concerned – if I am going to be judged, please let there be a liberal dose of mercy used in the judging.

A short version of what James is saying here; If you want to receive mercy – then you have to do mercy. As we sow, in this same manner we shall reap. Do I want my judgment based upon how well – or how poorly – my outward appearance is?

If you have ever had the opportunity to notice, most accused are told to “dress up” when they are brought before the judge. So apparently many people might think we do, especially those who look well – but what if that particular look is offensive to the one or ones making the judgment? This is favoritism – and would be on the part of my judge or judges.

Do I want my judgment based upon my socio-economic status? We might think we do, if we think our particular standing is the better one – in this case is it better to be poor – or in this case it is better to be well off. But what if the person – or the persons – making the judgment happen to have a negative attitude toward people in our socio-economic position? This is favoritism - and would be on the part of my judge or judges.

Do I want my judgment based upon how well I have treated others? Do I want to receive the same measure of mercy that I have extended to others?

The Word of God tells us this is the way we will be judged. Since we are going to be judged – in the same manner that we have judged others. Now that we Know this, how should we treat others? Even when the circumstance and the situation is such that we must – In some manner judge others – how do we want to judge them?

Knowing that God is going to deal with us in the same manner that we deal with others – Now that we know this – how do we want to deal with others? How do we want to talk to others? Are we so sure that we will appear on the very top of God’s List – That we are willing to show favoritism toward others?

James – 07 Show No Favoritism

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this lesson and bring with you to discuss with the group the next time we meet:

James – 08 Worthless Faith

“What good is it?” – this is a fairly common question among human beings. Some ask the question when others try to get them to buy something. “What would I ever use it for?” – “Will this help me to make more money?” – “Will this increase my business?” – “Will this make my job easier?” – etc.

Some ask the question when others try to get them to help do something. “What good will this accomplish?” – “What difference is it whether this gets accomplished or not?” – etc.

Some ask the question when others try to get them to learn something. “What would I ever use algebra for?” – “Why do I need to study history?” – “Why do I need to learn about adjectives and adverbs, nobody I know ever uses them?”

Read James 2:14 and make notes:

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – James asks this question in regards to people claiming to be a Christian, who never do anything for the Christian cause. “What good is it to claim to have faith but have no corresponding deeds?”

If a man claims to have enough money to buy every business and building in town – what good is it if he never uses any of that money to buy anything for himself or anyone else?

If a man claims to have more physical strength than 3 ordinary men – what good is it if he never uses that strength to help himself or anyone else?

If a man claims to have more intellect than most any other two people put together – what good is that intellect if it is never used to provide goods for himself, his family, or his fellow man?

In the very same sense – what good is it to claim to have faith – if that faith is never used? “Oh yes, I have enough faith to move mountains” – but if that person never uses their faith to assist anyone – what good is it?

“I have faith that God can heal any disease” – what good is it if that person never uses their faith to pray for healing – or to speak words of faith and encouragement to those who need healing.

“I have faith that God will guide me, direct me, and help me in all that I do” – but if that person never does anything but just lay around, eat, and sleep – what good is that faith?

If a person claims to have faith in God, but they do no Christian works or deeds – is that claimed – or professed – faith going to save them?

James – 08 Worthless Faith

Read Ephesians 2:8 and make notes:

We are “saved by grace” – and this “saving grace” flows through the conduit of faith. “Professed” faith is not the kind of conduit through which saving grace flows. Saving Grace flows through a conduit of “Working” faith. This is faith that is used – faith that is busy and active. We are not saved by works, but we are saved by grace when we put our faith into action.

Saving Grace flows through the conduit of a living and dynamic faith – rather than a dead and stagnant faith. Faith that is doing nothing – faith that is not used – is like a pool of water into which no new water flows – and from which no water flows out. It becomes stagnant water – and in a short amount of time – this stagnant water will not even support life. It becomes dead water.

Faith that is not used, does not leave room for any new faith to come in – in time – this non-used faith becomes like stagnant water – unable to provide or sustain life. Saving Grace does not come through dead faith. Saving Grace comes through living faith that is alive, active, and being used.

So the short answer to the question posed by the Holy Spirit – through Peter – is NO! Salvation is not coming to the person who only claims to have faith, but never uses this alleged faith.

Read James 2:15 and make notes:

The Holy Spirit knew that we human beings have a tendency to make things way too complicated. We can spiritualize a thing so much that it is of no earthly good. So He inspires James to give us an simple and practical analogy – “suppose a fellow Christian is without clothes and daily food.” Believers are being asked to consider the realistic situation – not referring to just anyone – not referring to the lost person – But when we discover that one of our fellow Christians needs clothes – and maybe the daily supply of food.

Read James 2:16 and make notes:

James – 08 Worthless Faith

Now remember, the analogy we have been asked to consider – a fellow Christian who is without clothes and without food for today. If we say, “I sure wish you good luck” – how does that help them be clothed and how does that help them eat? If we say, “I sure hope you stay warm today and have enough to eat” – is our “hope” alone going to put clothes on them or is our “hope” going to put food on their table?

If a person is cold and needs clothing – our “warm words” without any corresponding actions - is of “no good” to that cold person. If a person is hungry and has no food to eat today – our “wishing” and our “hoping” that they eat well today without any corresponding actions – is of “no good” to that hungry person.

And this is not a deep theological principle is it? This seems so fundamental and so straight forward.

Read James 2:17 and make notes:

Suppose you were put in charge of a particular part of the work at your place of employment or business. Let’s suppose you needed three more people in order to get the job accomplished. So you assign someone the task – “go out and bring back three men.” A short time later this person wheels in three male corpses.

Maybe the person who brought these to you – had heard about what great workers these three men had been in times past – so they brought these based upon their reputation. Are you going to be happy?

They brought you three men – is this going to help you get your job done? Of course not, and before you start fuming about how silly this is – this is exactly what it is like, when we say we have faith, but we never have any actions that accompany that faith. This is just dead faith.

Read James 2:18 and make notes:

This is a very interesting way to challenge a person. “You claim to have faith – so prove to me that you have faith without any works.” This person would never be able to “prove” they have faith without any corresponding works. They could go on claiming to have faith – they could go on professing to have faith – but without ever doing something to demonstrate that faith – it could never be proved.

James – 08 Worthless Faith

On the other hand, the person who does deeds, is proving their faith every time they do some work. The person who is busy doing the work of the Christian, seldom has to spend their time telling other people “I have faith” – because what others are seeing them do – speaks loud and clear what faith they have – and often times just “how much” faith they have.

Read James 2:19 and make notes:

Do we claim to have faith in God? So do the demons. Do we claim that there is just “one God”? So do the demons. Isn't it sort of interesting that while the demons believe there is “one God” – all they do about that is shudder?

The primary meaning of the Greek word used here is “to bristle up.” So the “shuddering” can be out of fear, but it can also come about from intense anger. “To bristle up” in complete rebellion can cause one to shudder – or to tremble.

I have personally seen people get so angry that they literally shake and tremble. It really doesn't matter much whether we choose to believe the demons shudder because they are afraid of God, or they shudder because they are so angry with God. The bottom line is that the most they do with their “believing there is one God” - is that they shudder.

If we find ourselves in a court of law today, and we claim to have an alibi for a particular time and place – but we cannot prove the alibi to be true – it remains an “alleged” alibi – and quite frankly that is of no good in the court. If we claim to have a witness to prove our innocence, but we cannot produce the witness – they remain an “alleged” witness – and that it is of no value in the court.

Professed faith – or claimed faith – without the actions (or work) to support it - remains nothing more than “alleged” faith – and what good is “alleged” faith?

Read James 2:20 and make notes:

The person who claims to have faith but does not use that faith – is one of the most foolish people. It may be said that the person who claims to believe in God – but lives their life as though there is no God – is further from God than the person who says they just don't know if there is a God.

James – 08 Worthless Faith

Read James 2:21-23 and make notes:

Abraham was not considered righteous – based solely upon the actions or works he did.
Abraham was not considered righteous – based solely upon the things he professed.

Abraham was considered righteous - based upon the combination of his profession and his corresponding actions. It was when Abraham acted upon his professed faith – that God declared Abraham to be seen as righteous.

Read James 2:24-26 and make notes:

Verses 24 & 25 are some of the verses in the Bible - that when taken out of context - can appear to be saying something quite different. There are those who take verse 24 & 25 alone – and they use them to teach that it is works that get us into the Kingdom of God. It is so important that we keep these two verses connected with those that precede them and verse 26 that follows.

For those who may not have approved of the analogy I used earlier – of the corpses being brought in for men – please look at v26. In the same way that the body is dead without the spirit, our faith is dead without the corresponding works. The person who dies physical death does not cease to be a man or cease to be a woman. They do however, cease to be of any help in providing for their family, giving advice or assistance in any way. They are no longer of any benefit in the daily tasks of everyday living.

So it is, with the alleged faith that has no deeds, actions, or work which demonstrates that faith – it is dead faith. Alleged faith is of no benefit to anyone – not to the person who alleges to have it – and certainly not to any other person.

What is the message we can take from this lesson and share with new Believers?

A person's faith that does not go beyond mere words is a worthless faith. This principle is one that is causing many people a lot of grief. There are many parents today who are frustrated, angry, and greatly disappointed – because their children simply aren't doing what the parents are telling them to do. This is often times an example of this principle being discussed in James.

James – 08 Worthless Faith

The problem is that the children can't "hear" what the parents are saying with their words – because what the parents are doing with their actions is so loud that it drowns out the words.

Most of us have come to understand that "Actions speak louder than words." Our faith provides the basis for our works – but the strength of our faith comes only in the works we do.

Do we claim to have faith that God will feed the hungry? What are we doing with that faith? If that is what we claim, shouldn't we be helping feed the hungry?

Do we claim to have faith that God will provide work for those who need work? What are we doing with that faith? If that is what we claim, shouldn't we be helping to find jobs for those who need employment?

Do we claim to have faith that God will provide clothes for those who need them? What are we doing with that faith? If that is what we claim, shouldn't we be doing something to help those needed clothes?

Do we claim to have faith that God will save those who are lost and on the road to hell? If that is what we claim, shouldn't we be doing something to help bring the lost to Christ Jesus?

Let's consider the marriage analogy. A man and a woman have publicly stated their vows before witnesses. But in the following years – there are no more words of commitment, encouragement or support toward one another – they spend no time with each other – there are no actions to indicate any such vows exists. In such a case as described here, their marriage vows are completely worthless words!

What about the lost person who observes us at work – or as neighbors – or at church? Do they see our "faith" as something worthless – or do they see our "faith" as something they would like to have? Let's examine our faith. Do we have only an "alleged" faith? If so, what is the evidence?

What are we doing to help _____ ? – and just fill in the blank as to where we are helping. If we do nothing more than attend church services – we may have nothing more than an "alleged" faith. And what good is that? Christians need to commit to make sure that our faith is not counted as worthless. Are we willing to commit to do something with our faith? Will our Faith be "worthless" - Or will our Faith be worthwhile ?

One more question we should consider as a result of this text from James. Are we living our life as a "Christian Athiest?" This is someone who claims to believe in God, and who claims to be a Christian, but lives there life as though there is no God. What changes, if any do we need to make in our daily life?

James – 08 Worthless Faith

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this lesson and bring with you to discuss with the group the next time we meet:

James – 08 Worthless Faith

(this page for additional notes)

James – 09 The Tongue

There have been some very interesting discussions over whether Pastors, Missionaries, Elders, Deacons, Teachers, and other ministers should be held to a higher standard than other Christians who are not leaders in the church. What do you think?

Should Leaders in the Church be held to a higher standard than everyone else? Or, should leaders be held to the same standard as everyone? Should there be just one standard – and we are all held to the same standard?

Since I am a Pastor and Teacher in the Church – my personal preference is to want to be held to the same standard as everyone else. I don't want to be expected to live to a higher standard. I know I have weaknesses. I know that I struggle sometimes. I just want to be considered to be one of the human race – just a man, like every other man. My heart will cry out, "please don't expect anything special out of me" – I don't want to let anyone down. But that is my heart – what do you think?

Should Leaders be held to a higher standard?

The answer to this question has some far reaching implications for all of us. If it is true in the Church, that leaders should be held to a higher standard, then maybe it should be true in politics and other areas of life; such as business, schools, etc. If everyone is to be held to the same standard in the church, then maybe it should be true in other areas of our life.

Read James 3:1 and make notes:

There are several Scriptures in the Bible which give us indications that some people will be judged more strictly than others. This first verse in chapter three of James is one of these. "Because you know – that we who teach will be judged more strictly." This is the reason given why Believers in Christ Jesus should not "presume" to be a teacher.

The Holy Spirit – through James – warns Christians to be conscious of the simple fact that Leaders will be held to a higher standard. A Teacher is at greater risk of sin than the student. For a Teacher – the majority of our work is done with words. We don't live very long as a Christian until we discover that it is harder to avoid sin with our speech than it is with our deeds and actions.

As a teacher, when we "slip up" and teach error – not only have we committed that sin – but those who are listening to the teacher may go out and repeat that error – and thus multiply the sin many times over.

Because the students tend to trust their teacher – they take the words of the teacher as true and as correct so when a teacher sins with their words – we cause others to sin – and causing others to sin is always worse than committing a sin ourselves.

James – 09 The Tongue

This being true – then as a Teacher, I am more likely to receive chastisement. God expects a higher standard from those He calls to be teachers. Why would God hold the Teacher to a higher standard? And not just a higher standard of words, but of lifestyle?

One could argue – that as long as the Teacher gives forth “good instruction” when they are teaching – what difference does it make how they live their private life? Look at what Jesus said:

Read Luke 6:45 and make notes:

If the Teacher is filling their heart with evil while going about their private life – then when it is time to Teach – remember, the Teacher “speaks.” When it is time to Teach, out of the mouth of the Teacher comes the overflow of what is in the heart. If the heart is filled with evil, then out comes evil. If the heart is filled with disrespect and contempt for others, then out comes disrespect and contempt. If the heart is filled with rebellion, then out comes rebellion. If the heart is filled with cheating, then out comes cheating.

What the Teacher does in their “private time” is of great importance – for what we do in our private time primarily determines the “with what” we are filling our hearts. And what we have filled our hearts with, determines what will come out of our mouths. Will our words lead others to live to please God – or will our words lead others to live against God?

I am aware that there are churches – where they name many Believers as Teachers and as Preachers. A person who gets saved – shows such love and devotion to God – they express notable enthusiasm and zeal for the gospel cause – and the next thing you know – that church is calling them a teacher or a preacher. If God is leading them in that way – then they certainly should do that – but I am concerned that it may be more a thing of the flesh than of the Spirit.

Jesus only selected and appointed 12 Teachers during His 3 years of ministry – and some of them didn’t turn out well. Maybe we should be a little slower to name teachers and preachers – just maybe.

Read James 3:2 and make notes:

We all stumble in many ways. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. There is none righteous – no not one. James didn’t say “those who never sin are perfect people.” What James said was – “if there was a person who never sinned, then that person would be perfect.” And everyone except Jesus Christ falls into the first part of this verse – “We all stumble in many ways”. We don’t just “all stumble” – we stumble “in many ways”!

James – 09 The Tongue

The point James is getting to – isn't trying to limit the number of Teachers – but he is trying to warn about the dangers Teachers face. Teaching without setting the corresponding example – it is not only worthless – but it is damaging and destructive. Teaching without setting the corresponding example – can bring severe punishment. In an earlier lesson from James, we were told, “what we do speaks louder than what we say.” We all stumble – none of us is perfect. And we stumble in many ways. Now that this has been said:

Read James 3:3-4 and make notes:

James does not use “allegories” to make the case – but rather he uses real life examples with which everyone of that day would be very familiar.

If a person had never seen a bridle used on a horse – but they had seen wild horses running across the landscape – and you were to show them the little piece of metal we call a “bit” that is part of the bridle – do you think you could get them to believe – that by using this little piece of metal you could make a horse change directions?

They might respond with something like, “now wait a minute – you want me to believe that you can take this little piece of metal and make that great big strong horse change directions ? – no way! It’s not sharp on the ends and even if it were – if you were to poke the horse with it they would just run. And no matter how hard you throw it, if you were to hit the horse with it, they are just going to run – not necessarily in a different direction.

Perhaps if a person had seen a large ship sailing on the Sea of Galilee – they saw the winds causing the sails to billow out – they could see that the winds are pushing the ship along. And then you show them a little piece of wood and ask them if they believe you can make that ship change directions with this little piece of wood – they may find that hard to believe.

They might believe either of these assertions only after seeing the bit in action and the rudder in action. As big and strong as the horse is – that little piece of metal putting pressure on the jaw – makes the horse willing to change directions. As big as the ship is and as strong as the winds might blow – that little piece of wood, placed at just the right location under the back of the ship – makes the ship change directions.

That’s the same kind of influence this little thing we call a tongue – has over the rest of the body. Regardless of how big and how strong we think our physical body is – regardless of how well developed we think our muscles are – the words spoken by the tongue can make the body do just about anything.

For those who are doubting this – just ask Samson, the strongest man in the world, how it came to be that he allowed the source of his strength to be taken away from him – and he will tell you it was because he kept listening to the words of a sweet young thing called Delilah.

James – 09 The Tongue

Just ask Solomon, the wisest man in the whole world, how it came to be that he walked away from the very source of all his wisdom – and he will tell you that it was because he kept listening to the words spoken by all these pretty women that wanted to be his “wives”.

We can talk to some men – and some women – right here in our community and ask them why in the world did you do such a stupid thing – I know you are smarter than that – and they will say – I kept listening to what this other person said.

If we were to look at pictures of a “horse bit”, a “ship rudder”, and a “human tongue” - it is very likely that no one would see anything these three things appear to have in common. And in physical appearance, they have nothing in common. They are not made out of the same material – nor are they shaped the same. But these three things, are very small in comparison to the thing they can cause to change directions.

Read James 3:5 and make notes:

Although the tongue is a small part of the body, sometimes it sure does make big boasts on behalf of the rest of the body. But before we dismiss this “great boasting” because it is coming from such a small part – Have you considered the great forest fire that destroys millions of acres of forest? That great fire was started by a little biddy spark !

Read James 3:6 and make notes:

Whew ! – talk about not mincing words! The tongue is not only able to change the whole course of a person’s life – but it is able to set the whole course of a person’s life “on fire.”

Two things to consider at this point:

First:

The fire, if left unchecked – will destroy the object of the fire – in this case the person’s life

Second:

The fire that sets the course of a person’s life on fire - the fire that comes into a person’s life via their tongue - this fire was set by hell. The fire that destroys a person’s life originated in hell.

Read James 3:7-8 and make notes:

James – 09 The Tongue

In those days, just like today, human beings take a certain pride in knowing that man has and can train huge, strong, wild critters to do what we want them to do. And yet, while we can tame the largest of creatures, we can't seem to "tame the tongue" of mankind. James declares the human tongue to be "restless" – but more specifically a "restless evil."

I heard someone say several years ago that the tongue appears to be the only muscle in our body that never gets tired. Our vocal chords can become so exhausted that we can hardly make a sound – but the tongue is still willing to try to say more words.

Read James 3:9-12 and make notes:

With the same tongue that we praise God – we then turn around and use it to curse men. How can one justify cursing a person who is made in God's likeness if we praise God? How does one justify praise and cursing coming out of the same mouth?

In nature, we certainly don't find fresh water and salt water coming out of the same spring. A spring gives forth one or the other – but not both. In nature, we don't find fig trees producing olives – nor do we find grapevines producing figs.

Everything on this earth produces after "its kind." It ought to be one of the most simple principles to us - can a sanctified mouth go around pronouncing curses upon the likeness of God? Where could this be any more perplexing than for those who profess to speak with tongues given by the Holy Spirit, to then speak curses? If we find ourselves speaking praise and then curses – we need to stop and sincerely examine our heart from which this mouth speaks.

From time to time a dear Christian allows something wrong to come out of their mouth. And the response is very different for them - than it is from those who only claim to be a Christian. You see, those who are not saved – they will say things like "well, God knows what I am like" – "God will forgive me, because He knows I said this in anger." The person who only claims to be saved – but does not have a regenerated heart – will find several ways to justify the wrong thing they have said – even if it was clear and unmistakable cursing.

On the other hand, the person who is truly saved – will feel convicted as soon as they realize what they have said – they apologize – they repent – and they ask forgiveness even when the thing they said wasn't cursing – but it was unkind – mean sounding – or just simply lacking in grace and mercy. Instead of trying to justify that it was okay "in these circumstances" to say this – the saved person is repenting and seeking forgiveness.

So, if we can spew forth sinful words, and be "okay" with that – or feel that "under the circumstances it is acceptable" – then we need to consider that we are probably not a saved person. Out of the heart – the mouth speaks ! What is coming out of the mouth?

James – 09 The Tongue

Did you notice that James began this section saying we should not rush to put ourselves into the position of being a teacher – then began something of an attack on the tongue. He seems to have spent some time stressing how much evil can be accomplished with the tongue.

Before we start trying to argue with James – or try to excuse what we might think is a person speaking out of some hurt feelings – “oh, you know, maybe James was deeply wounded by the words of someone” - If we believe the Holy Spirit inspired James to write this – we dare not dismiss it or argue with it – instead we will strive to get the message from it the Holy Spirit intended.

The evil or the goodness of many things is not to be found within the thing itself. It is evil or it is good based primarily upon how it is used.

Most sermons on this text are built around how evil and how irrepressible is the tongue. But let me point out that the tongue – while impossible for man to tame and train – is a wonderful gift when it is tamed and trained by God.

Read Proverbs 18:21 and make notes:

As long as we think – “I will train my tongue – I will get control of it” – we will find this impossible. But if we will turn our tongue over to God – we will find it speaking words of life instead of words of death. Under the direction of the Holy Spirit – our tongues will speak forth encouragement instead on condemnation. Under the direction of the Holy Spirit – our tongues will built up instead of tearing down.

Remember the examples given by James – how such a little thing can change the course or the direction of the horse or ship? We are missing the point when we stop at saying – “My, look how that little old tongue is able to change a person’s direction from good to evil.”

Once we grasp the Biblical Truth that the power of life lies in the tongue – we will start using our tongue to change our direction - from a direction going into the “dark side” of life - and get us turned into the marvelous Light of Jesus Christ.

Let us consider James’ statement that we all stumble – and in many ways. When we see another person who claims to be a Believer stumble – How do we use our tongue? Do we use it to condemn – tear down – to point out that they have stumbled? Or Do we use our tongue to forgive – inspire – encourage – and spur others on to good works?

Let us consider James’ example of the horse bit and the ship rudder – The horse doesn’t tame itself – a human being is involved and takes action – Making use of a little piece of metal called a bit – To train the horse - to get the horse where it is willing to be used in a fashion that benefits others – instead of just running around “looking good”?

James – 09 The Tongue

The ships on the sea are a good picture of the minds of human beings – the strong winds that blow are a good picture of the desires of man. Without the rudder – the ships are at the mercy of the winds – not only is there no telling where the ship will go – but it is most likely that the ship will be destroyed upon the rocks somewhere.

The minds of people that are simply driven by their desires – their direction is uncertain – and their inevitable destruction upon the hard places of life are sure. And yet, like the rudder upon the ship – that small thing can be used to steer the ship away from places where it will be destroyed – and can be used to make the ship go in directions that benefit mankind.

The tongue – that small thing – can be used to steer the person away from places of destruction – and it can be used to direct our lives in directions that will benefit others.

Who is in control of the rudder of our life today? What evidence is there?

Who is in control of the things we say? What does the evidence of our typical conversation indicate about “who is in control”?

It really does matter what we say! It really does matter how we use our tongue! One more thing to consider: Do I want to be counted among the teachers?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this lesson and bring them with you to discuss with the group the next time we meet:

James – 09 The Tongue

(this page for additional notes)

James – 10 What Is Our Fruit ?

We find throughout the book of James, an “insisting” upon practical reality in regards to living out our Christianity. In the natural world, trees produce fruit according to their kind. James has pointed out that the same is true for mankind.

We produce fruit after our kind. So when all has been said, the test for all of us turns out to be our fruitfulness. Whatever we may say we are, the fruit we produce reveals the reality of what we are. We can make pronouncements and proclamations - we can say we are a Christian - we can say we are spiritually mature - we can say that we are wise concerning spiritual matters - But what does our fruit say about us?

Read James 3:13 and make notes:

The opening words of this section of the letter, make a very clear challenge for any of us who profess to have spiritual wisdom. Does our conduct support our claim to having spiritual wisdom?

Earlier, James spoke about Teachers and what they say. This section also applies very well to those of us who would claim to be a teacher. But like the earlier section – this applies to everyone who claims to be a Christian.

All of us exhibit the wisdom we have by the life we live. Whatever the level of wisdom we have – it is revealed in our lifestyle. If we are a genuine Christian – then our lifestyle will reflect the wisdom of God’s Word. Most of us would probably acknowledge that a person who has just been saved does not have all the wisdom of a Christian who has studied God’s Word for many years. But there would be some Biblical wisdom evident in their life.

The New Testament tells us Jesus “grew” in wisdom with God and with man. Then it is reasonable to expect Christians to grow in wisdom. In the earlier section James warned about the dangers of sin from the use of our tongue. Here in this section he is warning of the dangers of sin from the fruit of our lifestyle.

Since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, there has been no man - except Jesus Christ as man – who has been without sin. But during this same time, there has been a distinction between those who are making an effort toward right living and those who make no effort at all.

There has always been – and there is today – a clear distinction between those who believe there is such a thing as right from wrong, as opposed to those who believe right and wrong are only relative terms. Those who believe God exists, generally believe there is distinct rights and distinct wrongs. Those who deny God’s existence tend to see things as right or wrong based upon the circumstances.

James – 10 What Is Our Fruit ?

There is then a clear distinction between earthly wisdom and Godly wisdom. Worldly wisdom is usually self-seeking to some extent. Godly wisdom will have such a minuscule part that is self-seeking – if any at all. Worldly wisdom almost always makes an attempt to negate Godly wisdom.

Read James 3:14 and make notes:

Isn't this an interesting instruction? - "if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition". First – don't brag about having envy or selfish ambition. Secondly – don't deny the truth that you have these. It is wrong for a Christian to brag about being envious or having selfish ambition – but it is also wrong for a Christian to lie about having either.

We are to tell the truth about feeling "envy" when we have it – and we are to tell the truth about having "selfish ambition" when we have it – BUT we are not to admit it in such a way as to be bragging about it. The point in admitting that we are feeling either of these would be to receive the prayers of others To get rid of these from our heart, mind, and life.

Read James 3:15 and make notes:

The so-called wisdom of "envy" and "selfish ambition" - these things do not come down to us from heaven – these things are the opposite of being spiritual – and in fact they come from the devil. So please don't ever claim "this is the way God made me" regarding envy or selfish ambition.

In the previous section James stated that the language of our tongues, that burns up the lives of ourselves or others – this kind of language comes from hell. Here he says plainly that things like "envy" and "selfish ambition" come from the devil. What place in our lives should we make – or provide – for anything that comes from Satan?

Read James 3:16 and make notes:

James – 10 What Is Our Fruit ?

James is pointing out that the fruit of envy and selfish ambition is “disorder and every evil practice”. It is hard to have peace or an orderly life when the fruit of envy and selfish ambition are producing fruit. “Disorder” is like a weed in the lawn where we desire grass. If it is left unchecked, it will spread and choke out the peace until our lives have more chaos than peace. How much evil practices are included in the statement “every evil practice”?

The fruit of envy and selfish ambition is virtually every evil practice. There really is no limit to the kinds of evil practices that will come about if we allow envy and selfish ambition to remain in our lives. These things are the direct opposite of the fruit of the true wisdom that comes from God.

Please don’t brush this off quickly and read on looking for something that sounds more exciting. This principle is of significant importance to us as Believers in Christ Jesus. Consider for a moment a person who enters into the political arena and gets elected to office. Suppose this person is honest, a person of integrity, and they have a real heart’s desire to make this a better county, or state, or nation. Then at some point they allow “envy” of another politician’s position or influence to take root in their heart. And then they allow “selfish ambition” to take root as well.

Maybe they start by rationalizing that “after I get that kind of power I will be able to do so much more for my constituents.” In order to feed their “envy” and in order to attempt to satisfy the appetite of “selfish ambition” every evil practice may – and probably will – come into play. The order of the day becomes “whatever it takes”.

If it takes a few years of working “every evil practice” to acquire the kind of power and influence they set out to get. And if they actually make it to that position. What is the likelihood that this person is now going to suddenly start using this newly acquired power to do things that help the people back home? Such a quest for power in the political arena has destroyed many good people and has turned them from a life’s purpose of helping others to the dark side of destroying whomever they have to in order to get what they want.

And it isn’t just in the political arena – the very same thing happens in the business world. And how sad it would be if it were only to happen in those arenas – but you see, it happens in the church too! As a minister – as a church leader – as a church member – if we allow “envy” and “selfish ambition” to take root in our lives – then it won’t be long until we have no peace and we will be participating in every evil practice.

As Believers in Christ Jesus – we cannot risk bringing forth the fruit of destruction that comes about from “envying” some other minister or church. As Christians, the risk of destruction is simply too great – we cannot allow “selfish ambition” to share any place in our lives. Because it will lead “really good people” into literally every evil practice – because it will become “whatever it takes” mentality.

James – 10 What Is Our Fruit ?

Have you ever wondered “what happened” when you heard about some minister you know started out with a pure heart to serve God and God’s people – has now fallen into sinful practices – right in the church?

Have you ever wondered “what happened” when you heard about some Christian brother or sister you know was a person of integrity – is now doing all kinds of shady and underhanded business things? If you have ever wondered – today’s lesson has probably answered the question. And let me point out – not one of us is immune to these things. So we must stay away from them.

Read James 3:17 and makes notes:

Ahhh ! – the wisdom that comes from heaven:

- . First – it is pure
- . Secondly – it is peace-loving
- . Thirdly – it is considerate
- . Fourthly – it is submissive
- . Fifth – it is full of mercy and full of good fruit
- . Sixth – it is impartial
- . Seventh – it is sincere

If you have ever wanted to have a yardstick with which to measure wisdom to see if it is from God or is a fake – here it is.

Let’s consider these characteristics for a brief moment: This means Godly wisdom is free from defilement – both ceremonial defilement and worldly defilement. Godly wisdom has moral integrity. And let me point out that this “purity” is not simply one characteristic or quality among several. “Purity” is at the heart of every other characteristic or quality.

Godly wisdom is also peaceful. It is empty of strife with others – or at least minimal. And it leads to and produces a life empty of strife with God. This also means Godly wisdom leads the Christian not only to live a peaceful life for themselves – but it leads them to spread the peaceful life to others.

Godly wisdom is considerate of others – quite the opposite of selfish ambition. The astute business person who is a Christian may very well do business in such a manner that brings them all the income and profit they possibly can – but not at the destruction of another.

James – 10 What Is Our Fruit ?

Godly wisdom is also submissive – the opposite of disobedient. Those in charge of military units learned years ago that the absence of submission destroys the unit. They may not have known submission was a quality of Godly wisdom, but they had observed the destruction brought about by disobedience.

So disobedience simply isn't permitted in the military. No church can survive continued disobedience. No Christian will want to allow disobedience to remain a part of their life.

Godly wisdom is not so concerned about the law that it cannot make a place for mercy. In fact, Godly wisdom, is full of mercy – just like it is full of good fruit.

The Jewish Leaders were sticklers for every detail of the Law. They believed in mercy – and in fact mercy was considered to be a high quality. But they also believed mercy was something that was to be excluded from certain persons and certain situations. They would not be called “full of mercy” – for there were empty spaces where no mercy was allowed. For the Christian – when we have the wisdom that comes from God – it will be “full mercy” – no one excluded – no one exempted – available to all and every.

Earlier in James there were some condemning words for the one who wavers. Proverbs also has some negative things to say about the person who flip-flops. The wisdom that comes from God brings about single-mindedness. If it's right today, then it's right tomorrow. If it's right for you then it's right for me.

Godly wisdom has no hint of flattery. Godly wisdom is sincere in instruction, sincere in encouragement, and sincere in support. Now as we consider these characteristics or qualities of Godly wisdom – how distinct and how opposite is the fruit that comes forth from “envy” and from “self ambition”. That's why James refers to these as “so called wisdom”.

Read James 3:18 and make notes:

It is predicted – it is prophesied – it is declared – that “sowing in peace” produces a “harvest of righteousness”. Instead of saying they will “reap” righteousness – James declares they will “harvest”. “Harvest” sounds like something more than simply “reaping”

Consider first that it is “seeds” that are sown – and it is “fruit” that is harvested. It is said that Peacemakers will harvest the fruit of “Righteousness”. Then let us consider “Peacemakers” – what does a “Peacemaker” sow? In different situations the Peacemaker may “sow” or do different specific things in order to “make peace”. So there isn't just one thing – there are in fact many things. But as the Peacemaker is busy doing what they do in order to obtain peace – they are sowing seeds – and these seeds when full grown and mature – produce fruit.

James – 10 What Is Our Fruit ?

The fruit is not “righteousness” – because “righteousness” is not a fruit. But what is harvested is the fruit of righteousness. So the Peacemakers are sowing seeds of righteousness as they go about making peace. Anything that calls itself wisdom or is presented by someone as wisdom – that does not work toward peace – does not have the characteristic of wisdom that comes from God.

True wisdom comes from God – and it will reflect His character. People who boast, show signs of jealousy, and do things that benefit themselves at the expense of others – reflect a false wisdom that originated with Satan. God’s wisdom has many notable characteristics – but perhaps the most notable of them is the bringing of peace within the Believer and to others around them.

Earlier in James – we were told that Teachers who don’t live out what they profess would be better off being silent. In other words – live what you teach. In this section James is saying that those of us who claim to have wisdom from God – should live our lives in such a manner that it reflects the characteristics of God’s wisdom. To live our lives in this manner is far better than teaching the way to live to others.

Elsewhere in the New Testament we are told that “Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” If we sow the seeds of righteousness – then we will reap the fruits of righteousness. What is the fruit of righteousness? One main fruit is “eternal life.” Here is the other side of that coin; those who sow in the false wisdom also reap the fruit of what they sow. Just consider what the fruits of non-righteousness might be: Death, judgment, lack of rest, discomfort - forever!

It was mentioned earlier how destructive it becomes when a Christian becomes envious of another church or ministry. Here is the broader truth – it isn’t just being envious of another church or minister. “Envy” of any other thing or person brings about destruction in our lives.

As Christians, we cannot afford to allow “envy” of anything or anyone to take up residence within us. As Christians, we cannot allow “selfish ambition” to have any place in our lives – not in the church – but not in the business world – not in the political world – and not in any area of our home. Selfish ambition in any area of our life will bring destruction to all areas of our life.

Jesus Christ came that we might have life and have life to the full. It should be plain to anyone who will pay attention, that the fruits of “un-righteousness” are diametrically opposed to what Jesus wants us to have.

God is examining the fruit of our lives – More than He is evaluating our words. We will do well to examine ourselves using this same criteria. So, what is the fruit of our current lifestyle? If I claim to be wise in the things of God’s Word, does the fruit of my life confirm that, Or does it deny that? If I claim to be spiritually mature as a Christian, does the fruit of my life confirm my claim, Or does it refute my claim?

James – 10 What Is Our Fruit ?

Though I have weakness – though I fall from time to time - Does my lifestyle confirm or deny - My claim that “I am trying to grow in the Lord”? What is it that we are saying about ourselves and our walk with the Lord? And what does the fruit of our lifestyle say?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this lesson and bring them with you to discuss with the group the next time we meet:

James – 10 What Is Our Fruit ?

(this page for additional notes)

James – 11 Adulterous Believers

Earlier in the book of James – there were some strong words to leaders and teachers. And while we did point out that those words applied to all of us. We now have arrived at a section of James that speaks directly - not to the teachers – but to everyone who is a believer. This section has some connections to chapter one - as it talks about the meek and the humble, to sinners and those who are double-minded.

Read James 4:1 and make notes:

The Greek word translated “desires” in this verse is the word “*hedonon*” – it is the word from which we get our English word “hedonism”. There was a very popular Greek philosophy in that day which presented the view that the chief goal of life was the pursuit, if not the attainment, of pleasure. And while that philosophy has ceased to be a major philosophic way of life – it has never truly disappeared – and we find it popping up in a number of societies in several generations since that time.

In the 60’s – right here in America – we heard the phrase “if it feels good do it” repeated on a national scale. Not all, but a large part of our society began to follow after that philosophy as a way of life. And we, as a nation, have suffered as a result of so many people accepting that philosophy as a guide to their daily life.

In the previous chapter we were told that true wisdom is peace and that false wisdom is strife. Here the beginning point of strife is identified for us. Basically, strife springs forth from our own desires that are within us.

Every believer has a battle take place inside of them at some point in their Christian walk. For most, this battle takes place early in their walk with Christ. For some, it may come later - but every believer experiences this battle at some point.

Our flesh, with its lust for fleshly gratification – battles against our spirit, with its desire for righteousness. And James points out – through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – that it is from this battle within us that Strife, fights, and quarrels come into our lives.

Read James 4:2-3 and make notes:

James – 11 Adulterous Believers

One of the 10 Commandments says we are not to covet and the Holy Spirit inspired James to say that Coveting is at the heart of why so many Believers are getting into quarrels and fights. When we read verses like this one – it is important for us to keep in mind that this is written to Believers – not pagans. It is Believers that have been wanting something so strongly that someone else has that they are “killing” to get it.

It is not all that hard to find Christians who are actually praying for God to make it possible for them to have the lust and desires of their flesh. Yes, Christians sometimes do fight for their fleshly desires and we even pray to receive the means to gratify our lusts.

There are a number of Bible scholars who struggle with this passage. They seem to be okay with the “fight and quarrel” part but they just can’t handle the “kill and covet” part. They feel this passage needs to be interpreted differently and the words need to be adjusted a little. Perhaps those who are most kind suggest that the “kill” is only with words. They would say Christians don’t literally kill another person.

It is true that far too many times, Christians have slandered and destroyed another person with their words – thus “killing” them verbally. But God’s Word does not need us to correct it – and when we walk and live among Christians for a few years – we discover that God’s Word is true just the way it is written – sometimes Christians do kill another person – they are usually immature – not in a right relationship with God – and are being led by the desires of their flesh and ignoring the leading of the Spirit. And it is not few and far between – it is fairly easy to find Christians who are praying for something with all the wrong motives.

We strongly crave to receive this “thing” or this “stuff” so that we can use it to gratify our fleshly desires. In these cases, it is not right to say we are praying “amiss” – or to say we are just “missing the mark” – in these cases we are “wrong”! Is this just “okay” with us? – or does it break our heart that Christians quarrel, fight, and even kill for the things we want – instead of asking God to give us the things we want?

Doesn’t it bother us just a little – that as Christians many of us are praying to God – asking God to give us something – but the reason we want God to give us this is so that we can gratify our fleshly desire? Isn’t this just a little troubling to us?

If Believers allow themselves to follow the hedonistic philosophy as a way of life – then we set out to obtain that which brings us pleasure or we think it will bring us pleasure. And our motive is to receive and to experience as much pleasure as possible and to do whatever it takes to avoid discomfort.

For those who have skipped over these first 3 verses of chapter 4 – the next few verses are a real problem. Having looked at the first few verses – we approach the next few verses with the understanding that coveting leads anyone – including a Believer – to seek pleasure – and seeking pleasure motivates a person – even a Believer – to do things that are unacceptable to God.

James – 11 Adulterous Believers

Read James 4:4 and make notes:

In this text, James doesn't quote some O.T. Scripture passage. Here he appeals to the knowledge that should be common to every Believer. "Don't you know?", is in the sense that this is common knowledge – at least to some degree every Christian does know and does realize that we cannot be in love with the things of this world and be in love with the things of God's kingdom. To give our lives to – and to live our lives for – anything of this world - is a type of idolatry.

Throughout the O.T. – and Jesus made the same analogy – any idolatry is seen as adultery in the God-Person relationship. So if we are giving ourselves to the things of this world when we should be giving ourselves to God's kingdom, we are indeed an adulterous people.

It is unfortunate – but many Christians do know and understand this principle – for they have experienced it. If a married person gives their time and their affection to another person other than their spouse – it is a type of adultery.

The married person who does not engage in any physical activity with another – but shares their emotions, their feelings, their desires with another – the married person who spends time in conversation that should be with the spouse – is committing a type of adultery.

I have counseled with far too many couples where this has taken place and the hurt inflicted on the spouse is deep and very painful. It is not that we cannot have friends outside our marriage – but any time we give to another – that which should be given to our spouse – it is adultery.

When we as Christians – give our time, our attention, our affections, our enthusiasm, our energy, our resources – to the things of this world – instead of giving these things to God – then we have become an adulterous people.

In the Gospel of Matthew (chp 6) we are told that we cannot serve God and serve the world. Here, James says it more clearly – friendship with the world is to become an enemy to God. Which would we prefer to be "our song": "What a friend I have in Jesus" – or "What an enemy to God I am"?

Read James 4:5 and make notes:

James – 11 Adulterous Believers

This is another of those passages that really bothers some. They quickly interpret this as speaking of God's spirit within us – and then they have trouble reconciling God's Spirit and it "envying intensely."

Without going through all the arguments, allow me to share with you the summary of what I am sure is the correct interpretation. When man chose to disobey God in the garden of Eden - when man willfully decided to sin – it was as a result of this willful disobedience that God caused "our spirit" to envy – and at times it will do so intensely. So it is the individual person's spirit that is envying intensely – not God's Spirit. And having our spirit to become intensely envious – makes the battle to be righteous even more difficult.

Read James 4:6 and make notes:

God did cause the spirit of disobedient man to envy – and that does make our internal battle more difficult for us. But God gives us even more grace!

We may preach and teach great messages about God – but any time we separate God and the message of Grace – we are selling God short – and we are cheating the people from the full message of God. "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." To the proud comes nothing but more trouble – But God gives grace to the humble – and this grace is stronger than the trouble – this grace is stronger than the envy – this grace is stronger than the evil we are battling.

Read James 4:7 and make notes:

This is one of those Scriptures that is very often only partially quoted. Frequently you will hear people say "resist the devil, and he will flee from you." But if that is all you do, then this statement is not true. If we don't first submit to God, then we are very likely going to be unable to resist the devil – and he certainly isn't going to flee from us.

The Christian that is not submitted to God – is of more use to the devil than the atheist or the pagan.

The Christian that is not submitted to God – is going to be working fully toward fulfilling their own lustful desires – and that is a very useful tool in the hands of Satan.

James – 11 Adulterous Believers

I am convinced that more local churches have been destroyed and damaged as a result of Christians working toward their own personal desires – than has ever been destroyed or damaged by an outside attack of the devil upon the church. And the same is true about a great many ministries that reach beyond the local church.

Read James 4:8-10 and make notes:

Like the father of the prodigal son, did not wait until the son came to where he was – but rather the father went out to meet his prodigal son - that is a good picture of God. For every step we take toward God – He will take 2 toward us.

Cleansing is speaking of preparation to be in the presence of God. Washing our hands speaks of cleaning up our actions and deeds. Purifying our hearts speaks of cleaning up our thoughts and our desires. David in the O.T. cried out for God to create in him a “pure heart” – and so should we if we want to come into the presence of God.

We need to put forth some effort to stop being double-minded - this means we need to stop the oscillating back and forth between wanting the world and wanting God. This somber call to mourn and cry isn't meant for every Christian.

This text has been wrongly used to declare that every Believer is to go about their daily life – looking, sounding, and acting as though they are miserable or at least unhappy. This call is to the “double-minded” Believers. If we are one of the Christians who is being torn between our desire for worldly things and recognition and our desire for righteousness – then we are to stop all the fun and games and get serious about our repenting of the worldly desires.

The person who comes before God with humble repentance will be lifted up. And to say that a person is lifted up is not speaking about a somber, miserable person. A person who has been lifted up is joyful and glad.

In these last 4 verses we find 10 instructions:

verse 7. (1) submit – (2) resist

verse 8. (3) come near – (4) wash – (5) purify

verse 9. (6) grieve – (7) mourn – (8) wail – (9) change

verse 10. (10) humble ourselves

James – 11 Adulterous Believers

What are your thoughts on these instructions?

There are three categories in which we should be prepared to help instruct other Believers; especially New Believers:

.1. Our Desires

There is nothing wrong with enjoying God's creation. It hinges primarily upon the purpose we are seeking these things. It would be easy to conclude that we should not spend time comparing what we own and the things our neighbor owns.

This sort of thing only intensifies the struggle within. However, it would be a very good thing for us to pray and ask God to help us with our motives. "Lord, help me, that I will have right motives for the things I am asking for – and the things I am working for." Maybe the thing we are desiring is not our neighbor's – maybe we are not coveting; but we still need to make sure our motive is right!

.2. Our Attention

We need to be careful that we do not give time and attention to someone or something that should be going to God. If a husband began to spend his spare time with another woman – even though he never physically touched her – If he was sharing his thoughts with her that he should be sharing with his wife - If he was talking through his plans for the weekend with this woman instead of talking them through with his wife - If he was sharing his plans for the future with this woman instead of doing so with his wife.

Let me share with you from what I have observed – that wife – when she found out – would be wounded to the core – she would express feelings of great pain – and she would see that other woman as an enemy to her and to her marriage. You can sit here and argue that your wife should not feel this way – you can argue how irrational you think she is being – you can attest with great conviction that you were only talking with this other woman. But I'll tell you that your wife is going to be deeply offended.

James – 11 Adulterous Believers

Let me point out that it works that way for the husband also – when his wife gives her time and attention to another man. So it is with God when we give to another what we should be giving to him. Let's believe that most Christians simply don't get involved in outright idol worship. But do we give our time and attention to someone or something else? The time and attention that should be given to God?

.3. Humility

Not all pride is pride in doing wrong. Many times Christians become very proud of their “right living.” I have met a great number of people who claim to be a Christian and they walk and talk and conduct themselves as though they are so very proud of the fact that they live a more righteous life than the rest of the Christians they meet.

Those who have met Jesus personally – those who have had a personal and intimate encounter with Christ Jesus – these are the ones that realize and acknowledge that the only righteousness we have is that which the Father in Heaven gives to us.

This robe of righteousness I get to wear – well it is not of my doing. It is because my Heavenly Father took of His Righteousness and made a robe for me – and He placed this robe of righteousness upon me.

Now how can I be proud of this? This, by its very nature, is more of God's Grace that has been extended toward me – I rightfully so, can be thankful for it – but I can not be proud of it.

Let us keep our motives for wanting to be for a pure cause. Let us make sure that we do not give to another that which we should be giving to God. Let us keep a humble attitude about ourselves and our walk with Christ.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this lesson and bring them to discuss with the group the next time we meet:

James – 11 Adulterous Believers

(this page for additional notes)

James – 12 Slandering Christians

In the first part of chapter 4, James warned Believers against giving to others, the time, attention, and resources that should be given to God. We could summarize that first part as having to do with Our love relationship with God. Now in this next part of chapter 4 – James addresses our love relationship with other Christians.

Read James 4:11 and make notes:

It is easy to connect this verse with 1:26 – to put it simply, James says our failure to bridle our tongue is a form of self-righteous pride. In the earlier part of this chapter we were told the same is true of self-confident boasting.

We have mentioned several times in this series from James – that this was written to Believers rather than non-believers. As one of several evidences to this – here we find James using the word “brother” twice in this one verse.

This warning is not made to non-believers who are against Christianity – it isn’t made to the Gnostics who are teaching contrary to Christian teachings – this warning is made to Believers who have become proud – Believers who in their speech run down others in the world and other Believers.

There are many injunctions against running down others with our words found in the O.T. We are warned not to say things against God and not to say things against our fellow man. Miriam was punished because she spoke against Moses.

Teachers in the Old Testament era called “slander” the “third tongue” because it killed three people. Their saying was that slander killed “the speaker, the spoken to, and the one spoken of”.

The point of this is that these early Christians already had some background of teaching that said “slander” was not an acceptable type of conversation. So this injunction against slander isn’t some new Christian teaching that they just need time to get hold of.

Jesus is recorded in Matthew 7:2, as saying that we will be judged in the same manner that we judge others. Look again at the last part of James 4:11.

The last part of this verse is troublesome to many Bible scholars – it is really not clear as to the precise meaning of the law that takes place in this verse. There is a lot of debate over what exactly is meant by saying, we “speak against the law” when we speak against a fellow believer.

James – 12 Slandering Christians

It may be that our fellow believer somehow personifies the law. So, if we speak against one who personifies the law, then we are speaking against the law. We are to obey the law, we are not to sit in judgment of the law.

To sit in judgment of another is to place ourselves above that person. To sit in judgment of the law is to place ourselves above the law we are sitting in judgment of.

And if we wish to continue this kind of logic – judging the law eventually leads us to judging the “law giver” – which ends us placing ourselves above God – because He is our law giver.

Perhaps the best interpretation of the last part of this verse is in regards to the command in Leviticus, that Jesus renewed – “Love your neighbor as yourself.” If we speak against our neighbor, we are at the very least violating this command.

The teachings of the Rabbis in the Old Testament era – told the people that disavowing one’s neighbor would eventually lead to denying God. We would do well to stop and consider the long reaching affects of our current actions and speech. I am convinced that very few Christians today ever stop and consider the long reaching consequences of the words we speak.

Most of us understand that respect for law and order is necessary for the health of our modern society. But do we grasp the concept that continuing to live in a permissive society ultimately leads to a disrespect for the authority of God Himself?

Read James 4:12 and make notes:

God is the sole “lawgiver.” God gave the law. God alone is above the law. God, and no one else, has the right to modify the law – or overrule the law on some point. God is the sole “judge”.

God, unlike us humans, is the only one who is able to be completely unbiased, completely impartial, and make totally fair and just judgments. God is the final judicial authority.

We have many people recorded in history who have done heroic things and have managed to save another person from death. There are those who have done heroic things and have saved groups of people from death – or from great agony.

It is indeed a wonderful feeling to realize that you have done something that helped another person escape imminent death – or serious physical pain. But even those who have had the blessing to help save another person’s life – do realize that there are many things on this earth from which we cannot save another person.

James – 12 Slandering Christians

There are so many things on this earth over which we humans simply have no control – and with our best intentions, best technology, and best team work – we simply cannot change their course.

There is truly only one who is able to save from everything – and that is God alone. There is only one who can destroy everything – such as the indestructible dangers that come our way – and that is God alone.

People who are truly humble in their heart – understand that they are in no position to pass judgment upon another person. While we may not have committed the very same sinful act as this person – we realize that the sins we have committed are just as repugnant in the nostrils of God.

Believers who are truly humble in heart – tend to have much more concern for the judgment we will face than for making sure that this other person receives the judgment we think they deserve.

As Christians, we must be careful about how we plan our lives. It is far too easy for us to come up with a plan for our lives – that the ultimate consequences of this plan is one in which God has been left out – or maybe even pushed out.

We must be careful about the decisions and choices we make today! We should consider – will the ultimate consequences of this decision – or of this choice – will it ultimately lead to me placing myself somehow above God?

As Christians, we cannot afford to slip into pride – or allow pride to slip into us. For the ultimate end of pride is our destruction. And I can assure you that Satan is very aware of this truth. And Satan will do all that he can to help encourage us to begin to embrace pride and to make it a part of our heart, our attitude, and our conversation.

As Christians, we cannot afford to be minding the business of other people. When we begin to mind other people's business, we have allowed pride to slip into our lives. This pride will ultimately lead to contempt toward other people. As Christians, we need to mind our own business.

Have you noticed a Christian who sees another person suffering – and then they begin to criticize them and maybe even slander them? That's a sure sign that this Christian has forgotten their own weaknesses and sins. When a Christian condemns and criticizes another Christian – we condemn ourselves.

Have you noticed a Christian who sees another person who is not living to the exact standard of righteousness they believe they are living? They tell others that "I would never do that" – "I would never allow that in my home" – and the list is quite long.

James – 12 Slandering Christians

It wasn't just true in James' day when this letter was written – it is so true today. Christians are quick to put down another Believer when they don't think the other person is living as righteously as they are.

Of course we always think we are more spiritually mature than others – we always think we know so much more of God's Word than others – but is either of these always true?

It certainly could be that if this other person knew what we know about God's Word that they would not do this. But have we considered that maybe they do know what we know. And maybe they have come to know something more that we don't know. It might be that if we knew what they know, we would think this is okay as well.

It certainly could be that if this other person was as spiritually mature as we are that they would not allow certain things. But have we considered that maybe they are in fact more spiritually mature than we are? It might be that if we were as spiritually mature as they are we would understand that there is no problem with this.

After having reminded us of the simple, profound fact that God is the only one who is qualified to judge others – James concludes with a very somber question; “But you-- who are you to judge your neighbor?”

The “but you” part is in contrast to there being only one who can save from all things, all situations, and all diseases. The “but you” part is in contrast to there being only one who can destroy all dangers, and all enemies. And that isn't any of mankind.

So, with that having been pointed out, the real question becomes “who are you to judge your neighbor?” With something of a shattering bluntness – James crushes any right we might think we have to sit in judgment of our fellow believers.

As we read the remainder of James' letter – it is striking that no answer to this question is given. James asks other questions in his letter and then offers an answer to them. But no answer is offered to this question.

And I believe the best way to respond to this question is the same way it appears to be responded to in this letter. The best way to respond to this question is with “solemn quiet reflection.”

Each of us should quietly consider – Close our eyes if we need – shut out all that may distract - And consider for a few moments - “Who am I to judge my fellow believer?” - “Who am I to say negative things about my fellow believer -” “even if they are true?”

James – 12 Slandering Christians

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this lesson and bring with you to discuss with the group the next time we meet:

James – 12 Slandering Christians

(this page for additional notes)

James – 13 My Plan or God’s Plan

In the previous couple of verses – the sin of arrogance was addressed. It was about the self-opinionated participating in a self-righteous smearing of others. Now the equally offensive sin of godless self-assurance is addressed. This is about the sin of presumption concerning our life.

Please keep in mind, this letter was written to Believers. As Christians, our life is not our own – our life belongs to God. Shouldn’t we give consideration to what God wants – at least try to find out what God wants – or purposes – for our life before we go about making plans and decisions?

Read James 4:13 and make notes:

Doesn't this sound like something we hear people say today; “we will go – we will spend a set amount of time – we will carry on our business – and we will make money”?

The time has been set – “today or tomorrow.” The location has been selected – the Greek text reads more like “this city.” The amount of time allotted to this endeavor has been set – “spend a year there.” The purpose is clearly identified – “carry on business.” And the result is predetermined – “make money.” Yes, this has a very contemporary ring to it.

It is very common today to hear someone declare somewhat emphatically that they are going to a particular place – they are going to engage in a particular business venture – and they are going to be very profitable.

Suppose I come to your house and take your check book – and then I start telling people what I am going to purchase with your money – how and where I am going to invest some of your money – at the very least, wouldn’t that be somewhat presumptuous on my part?

This sin of presumption is not limited to the arena of merchants – or simply to the marketplace. We Christians tend to allow this sin to creep into many areas of our life.

If we listen carefully, we can often hear Believers telling God what to do, when they are praying. We can hear Believers telling God where to send His Angels, and what His Angels should do. We hear Believers telling God exactly what to do for a particular person and even how He should go about it.

We tell God what circumstances He needs to change and in what way He is to change them. Without asking God, we just assume that the current situation and/or circumstance is against God’s will – or that it has not been allowed by Him to accomplish His purpose – and we start telling Him what He needs to do.

James – 13 My Plan or God’s Plan

And isn’t that the exact same kind of presumption that the person is expressing – when they say, “I will go to a particular place – I will engage in a specific business enterprise – I will do so for this amount of time – and it will be profitable – isn’t that the same? Yes! It is.

So, what the Holy Spirit is saying here through James is not an attack upon merchants – it is an analogy that brings a spiritual principle to the forefront for us to consider as Believers.

Read James 4:14 and make notes:

This plan is laid out as if they know exactly what will happen tomorrow – and is they know what the future holds – and as if they can control the future some how. If we stop and consider – the reality that we don’t know what is going to happen tomorrow – how foolish do we sound when we begin to declare what we will do and what will happen “next year” – or at any specified future time?

In the analogy given – the person is saying they will stay “one year” and they will make a profit. If they don’t even know what will happen tomorrow – how can they hope to know what will happen throughout the rest of the year?

There have been some years when a business have made great profits – and then there have been other years when the same business just barely broke even. And the business person was unable to predict either.

The Greek word translated “mist” – can be translated “mist, vapor, steam, or even smoke.” Whichever of these words you prefer to translate it into in this text – they all share some characteristics.

If our life is a mist – then our life does not really have very much substance in relation to the rest of the world – and our life does not last very long – and it is easily moved or dissipated. How much sense does it make to be boasting about something that is no more than a vapor or mist – something that is going to be gone in a short time?

The reality is that we don’t know if we will be here next year! We certainly don’t know what events will take place tomorrow. We don’t know what will break – what will work as it should – we don’t know what some other person may do that will affect us and our ability to work or to make money. The reality is that our knowledge about a great many things is limited!

James – 13 My Plan or God’s Plan

Read James 4:15 and make notes:

Instead of saying emphatically what we will do – it would be much wiser to say things like, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will do this or we will do that.” Earlier in Chapter 4 – it spoke of submission to God’s will – now it is talking about submission of our whole life to God.

If we truly accept the fact that “this life” belongs to God – then it only makes sense that we should seek God’s intended purpose or God’s intended plan for this life rather than presuming and making our decisions about this life.

No Christian should ever make the assumption that we can live independently of God. Whether any of us live or die today or tomorrow is ultimately in God’s control. This is truth concerning all people – but Christians certainly should never ever make this assumption.

It is very good to make plans. There are many texts within the Bible that tell us this. But Christians should always make their plans and leave room for the Plan and the Will of God in those plans.

There have been many times that a Believer has made plans – then God’s Plan and God’s Will takes place and it interferes with that Believer’s plans – and the Believer gets really angry – usually some of the anger – if not most of it – is directed toward God for messing up their plans.

What self-assuming arrogance and self-importance! This should never even be allowed to take root in the Believer.

Jesus made his desire for things to go differently very clear. Jesus didn’t hesitate or beat around the bush about how much he did not want to suffer and die in that manner. But Jesus, after laying out his desire for a different plan said, “never-the-less Father – not my will but yours be done.”

Read James 4:16 and make notes:

“Boasting and bragging” isn’t self-confidence. “Boasting and bragging” is a type of self-exaltation. The Believer who is “boasting and bragging” is not dependent upon the Lord.

James – 13 My Plan or God’s Plan

As we have seen before in this letter of James – he can get right to the point. He just flat out says, “All boasting is evil”! The Believer is to be bold, knowing that we “can do all things” – “in Christ Jesus.” But the Believer is also to be humble and realize that we can do nothing without Him.

God owns the future – God owns the future of this world – and God owns our future as well. It is just as wrong for us to make plans for our future without His permission – as it would be for me to make plans for your money without your permission.

Read James 4:17 and make notes:

James concludes this chapter with a pointed statement. If we know the good we are supposed to do – and we don’t do it – then we are sinning.

The original language used in this text – is talking about something more than simply a “sin of omission.” The original language is signifying the failing to do good by doing wrong. It is especially wrong for the person who knows it is wrong.

The thing – the deed – the words – etc. – may be wrong in and of itself – for anyone. The person who does not know it is wrong has done wrong even though they did not know it at the time – maybe it is only later that they find out that it was wrong. But the person who knows the right thing to do – or to say – when they do this – knowing it is not the right thing – for them it is more of an offense – because it is intentional – it is willful – it is rebellious.

The Holy Spirit, speaking through James – does not take away – or even deny the free-will given to each of us. But He is pointing out that everything we do is part of a wider plan – only a part of the big picture.

Believers are to be mindful of this – and to always seek God’s plan and to make sure that we don’t put ourselves in a place of working against God’s plan and God’s will.

The problem in this text isn’t in the fact that plans have been made – the problem isn’t that a person is making plans to make money – a good business plan would have that in mind. The problem here is that God was given no place in these plans.

Doesn’t it strike us just a little strange – that Believers spend so much money, time, and resources on vanity? This lesson isn’t about to become one against wearing makeup or certain clothing. But, let us consider for a moment, is there a limit to what we will spend – in regards to our money and time – in an effort to “doctor up” this temporal body?

James – 13 My Plan or God’s Plan

James declares, we are just a mist – we are here for such a short time – and then we vanish. When we consider the age of our world – and even the long life span of some people – we live here for such a short span – a fleeting moment.

The point has little to do with using makeup – fixing our hair – or any other outward appearance – but the point is about making the best use of the short time we have. The question has been asked from time to time – “If you knew you only had months to live – what would you do in that short time?”

I think most of us can understand that the person who knew they only have a few months to live would ignore – or bypass – the things they see as least important – and would apply themselves to the things they see as most important.

Well, in the big scheme of things – you and I have only a short amount of “world time” to live – what are we going to do with this short amount of time?

It is not a matter of losing our Free-Will. But it is a matter of using our free-will to compliment God’s Grace – and to compliment God’s Plan.

We know that we are here for a short time – we know that God has a plan for our lives – we know that God’s plan is not to harm us but to bless us. And for us to fail to place our lives into the guiding will of God is a grievous sin. Because we know the good we should be doing.

Let us make plans – let us make wise plans. But please remember that the wisest plans ALWAYS include God and God’s Plan. The wisest plans are always willingly submissive to God’s plan.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this lesson and bring with you to discuss with the group the next time we meet:

James – 13 My Plan or God’s Plan

(this page for additional notes)

James – 14 Hoarding or Circulating ?

It is unfortunate that a number of commentators present this section of James as an indictment against rich people. A great many see this as an attack on the rich lost person who makes life miserable for the poor saved person.

When we approach this text from this view point – we miss the rich message that God put here. So, once again, let us be reminded that this letter was written to Believers. It is the Holy Spirit who is the author of this letter. He spoke these things to James – and had James to share the word.

Read James 5:1 and make notes:

“Now listen” – today, we might say, “may I have your attention” – or “okay, listen up” – or “everyone needs to hear this”, etc. It is important for us to note that this charge is not against “all” wealthy people. The Holy Spirit has prompted James to say some things to wealthy people who are guilty of abusing those who are not wealthy.

“Misery” isn’t destined to come upon all wealthy people – but “misery” is destined to come upon a certain type of wealthy person. Please keep in mind that these scathing comments are directed to specific people who are guilty of abusive lifestyles toward others.

Read James 5:2-3 and make notes:

“Wealth” is sort of a collective term – it was used for an abundance of possessions. In those days they did not have banks – as far as we know they didn’t have stocks and bonds – there were no CD’s or retirement funds. The earliest forms of wealth was in having an abundance of food stored up, or an abundance of clothing, or an abundance of precious metals, or owning a great deal of land.

They did not have the protective methods that we have today. There was a real danger in storing up too much food. If the store of food was not eaten and replaced on a regular basis, the stored food would rot.

A similar danger existed for those who tried to store up an abundance of clothing. Clothing – or any cloth for that matter – that was stored away would often fall prey to the moth – and when they would take the clothes out to show them off – they would find holes in their precious stored clothing.

James – 14 Hoarding or Circulating ?

Even for those who might try to store up gold and silver – it too can oxidize and deteriorate if not afforded some protection from the elements and environment. This text is saying that the corroded gold and silver will stand as a picture of what has happened to their spiritual treasures.

In the end, the prosecutor will say something like, “look at their silver and gold – see how it has oxidized - this is a picture of what they have allowed to happen to their spiritual values – their spiritual relationship with God and with fellow believers.”

Just like our flesh cannot withstand the destruction of flames – neither can our spirit man withstand the destruction that comes about from this misguided values. “Just look at you – you have spent your last days hoarding wealth – when there were many more important things you should have attended to.”

Read James 5:4 and make notes:

“Look!” Another exclamation in an effort to get – or perhaps to regain – everyone’s attention. Consider the harvest season when people are hired to harvest the grains. Sadly, some of the Believers would be slow to pay the wages that have been earned by those who mowed the grains and those who winnowed the grains.

Just like some businesses today – back in those days – it was thought to be good business to hold out as long as possible to pay your bills. It is perhaps easier to explain in today’s economy – but the principles were the same back then.

The accountants that work for a large business today, might tell the owners a couple of things like:

Number 1:

“We will have to take some of our money that is right now earning interest to pay our bills for materials and labor, - so if we can wait to the last minute to pay the bills, then our money can earn a little more interest – after all everyday we earn a little more.”

Number 2:

“You know we are experiencing inflation – so a dollar just isn’t worth as much a month from now as it is today. So let’s wait to the last minute to pay these bills and then we will be paying less in effective money power.”

James – 14 Hoarding or Circulating ?

On the surface this does sound like good business strategy. This business strategy has a tendency to get stretched. Maybe it isn't the pre-determined intention to do so – but after a while, the attitude becomes more of a “don't pay until they start demanding it” attitude. Sometimes this calculated business strategy evolves into a sort of “see if we can get away without paying” attitude.

How does this “good business strategy” hold up when the person waiting to be paid is a fellow believer – and they can't pay their bills until you pay them? How good is that business strategy when we make it difficult for a fellow believer to provide for their family?

Consider the case where this fellow believer prays to God and ask God for help – exclaiming how they did their work as unto the Lord – how they gave an honest days work for a days pay – how they were faithful, reliable, and conscientious on the job – how does this business strategy hold up?

God hears the prayers of His people! God loves all of His Children. How does God feel toward one believer making another believer suffer?

Those who mowed fields during the harvest season were usually in the category of what we call “day laborers” today. There was no contract – no assurance of any work beyond today. They were hired to work in the field today – and it was right that they should be paid today. It was not uncommon for one who owned several fields to agree to hire a person to help harvest all of their fields – or at least several of them.

Sometimes the land owner would tend to pay at the end of harvest. Whether it was daily, weekly, or monthly – there was an appointed time when the laborer expected – and deserved – to get paid.

And sometimes the land owner would keep saying – “yeah, I'm going to get your pay to you real soon” – you know kind of like “the check is in the mail” phrase that is used today. The “failed to pay” phrase lets us know that this is something more than being a day or two late. It is more of a default in paying rather than being late in paying.

Did you notice in this verse, “The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you.”? It says the money that was to be paid, but is being withheld is crying out against them.

The original language for “crying out” is the same that is used for wild animals growling or howling when they are upset.

Read James 5:5 and make notes:

James – 14 Hoarding or Circulating ?

The problem was not that these people had lived in luxury – the problem wasn't that they had lived in some level of self-indulgence. If you can afford it, why not allow yourself to enjoy it? As long as it is moral and legal.

The problem was in the failure to see the plight of others in the times of trouble – such as the “day of slaughter”. While others around us are experiencing something akin to slaughter – we just continued with our self-indulging luxury. And the next verse tells us that it is actually worse than this:

Read James 5:6 and make notes:

It is possible that some of these wealthy believers did condemn in court some of the poor – it is also possible that some of the wealthy believers actually had an innocent person murdered. But this is much better understood in the terms of the failure to pay by those who were wealthy.

Remember, the poor believer was not attacking the wealthy believer. The poor believer wasn't trying in any way to compete with the wealthy believer. The poor believer wasn't trying to stop the wealthy believer in their effort to make a profit. The poor believer was not opposing the wealthy believer.

When the poor believer was taken into court because they could not pay their debts – and they were condemned for unpaid debts – and they would have been able to pay their debts if the wealthy believer had simply paid them their wages – then the wealthy believer is responsible for the condemning of the poor believer.

Following the leadership of Jesus Christ – we don't have to destroy the physical life of a person in order to qualify as having murdered them – if we slander them – if we destroy their reputation – if we make it difficult for them to be able to get work – then we have murdered them.

The poor believer who was unable to pay their debts – will find it difficult to borrow money – because the report gets around – this poor believer didn't pay their debts – so it becomes difficult – maybe impossible for them to borrow – this could make it difficult for them to be able to get the things they need in order to do another job for another person.

If a wealthy believer causes this to happen to a poor believer – then the wealthy believer has destroyed the poor believers ability to conduct their business – they have in essence murdered the poor believer. And this poor believer was not an enemy of the wealthy believer – “they did not oppose you.”

James – 14 Hoarding or Circulating ?

The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Money itself is not the root of evil. Having money is not the root of evil. Being wealthy is not an evil thing. Who could possibly be more wealthy than God?

God owns everything. It is from God's unlimited riches that He meets our every need. God is the "all-sufficient One". God is our "Provider."

Here is a truth every Christian needs to hold onto: The more of the character of God we can acquire and take into our lives – the less of a problem riches become for us. Loving money to the point of becoming blind to others around us – that is the root of all kinds of evil.

"Snow blindness" is when a person has looked at white snow for so long that their eyes cannot see anything but white. I understand that if a person experiencing snow blindness continues in this condition too long and doesn't receive treatment – they will permanently lose their ability to see.

"Money blindness" – or "wealth blindness" has a very similar affect. Believers simply cannot afford to focus upon riches – wealth – or money so much that riches is all that we can see.

In verse 3, James spoke of the "corroded" gold and silver. In reality, gold and silver doesn't corrode or rust. But they both do "tarnish" – and this too is a process of oxidation. Why would we even bother to bring up this little technicality? Who cares whether we call it rust – or corrosion – or tarnish?

We don't care what you call it. But the presence of tarnish upon gold and silver is an indicator of how long it has been stored up; or that it has been used very little. The degree of tarnish found upon the gold or silver testifies to just how dormant it has been.

If the gold and silver has been used regularly – it has passed hands on a regular basis – it probably will have no tarnish – it will be bright and shiny. But the less use – the longer periods of being dormant the greater degree of tarnish. The more tarnish – the less shine – the less it reflects – the greater the dull appearance.

So, when we stand before God – and our wealth is brought out in to full view – what will it testify? Will our wealth testify to being used often – or will it clearly declare that we kept our wealth stored up and didn't allow it to be used to help anyone?

How much more serious is the testimony of our dull riches going to be – if some of these dull riches had been earned by some poor believer – and we never gave it to them – and they suffered because of it?

Is this message only about worldly riches? No! It certainly does apply to worldly riches very well. But it also applies to kingdom riches. It applies to worldly riches – and the analogy of worldly riches is easy to see – but it is to be applied to kingdom riches.

James – 14 Hoarding or Circulating ?

Far too often, Believers take on a “better than you” attitude toward other believers. This is especially true concerning Gifts and Calling. Sometimes a Believer sees what they have as so much better – and so much more valuable than what another Believer has. A person wealthy with worldly riches who begins to see themselves as “better” than a person with few worldly possessions - is wrong. A believer who sees themselves as better than another believer is just as wrong. A believer that thinks the ministry they have been called to makes them better than the believers that have not been called to that ministry – is wrong.

A believer that thinks the spiritual gift they have makes them better than the believer who does not have that gift - is wrong. A believer who has the baptism of the Holy Spirit and thinks they are better than the believer who does not yet have the baptism of the Holy Spirit - is wrong.

I think most of us understand the importance of those with worldly wealth using it wisely. It also applies to those of us who have Spiritual wealth.

If you are having trouble grasping the spiritual implications of this – just consider those who have worldly wealth that do use it to help those around them. How they do help others by paying in a timely fashion. How they do help their community by using their wealth instead of just hoarding it away.

Take from this example and make sure that we use our Spiritual riches wisely. Let us share with others our gifts and ministry. Let us mentor those we are supposed to mentor. That is like paying wages.

Let us keep our Spiritual riches in circulation so that they do not become tarnished and dull. Let us make sure that no believer around us suffers because we did not give to them what we owe them.

If you can't see how you owe any of the other believers – we at least owe them love – so don't be late in giving love – and don't withhold love.

If Believers today – would faithfully keep our spiritual riches in circulation – we would not have to be praying and begging for God to send revival. We have to beg and pray for revival because far too many believers today are spending our time admiring our spiritual gifts – hoarding them and protecting – when our gifts should be in circulation; for the cause of Christ and for the strengthening of the Christian community.

List some ways in which you are faithful to keep your Spiritual Gift (or gifts) in circulation. List areas (or ways) in which you need to use your gift or gifts more regularly.

James – 14 Hoarding or Circulating ?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this lesson and bring with you to discuss with the group the next time we meet:

James – 14 Hoarding or Circulating ?

(this page for additional notes)

James – 15 Attitude Check

What is our attitude toward other Believers? Especially those other Believers who don't live up to the standard we just know is right? What about those Believers that just seem so immature to you – what is your attitude toward them?

Read James 5:7-8 and make notes:

The phrase “be patient, then, brothers” lets us know that the message is still to other Believers. After the strong language of verses 1-6 of this chapter, it is evident in this part of the text that the Holy Spirit wants to speak some words of encouragement to believers.

There are several Greek words that can be interpreted as “patient” or “be patient”, but the one used in this text is one of an imperative – this is something that simply must be done – it isn't optional. It is imperative that we, as believers, remain patient until the Lord Jesus Christ returns for us.

We must be patient with other believers, some of whom are immature – some of whom are ignorant of what God's Word actually teaches. We must be patient with the way God is working things out – even if it is much slower than we think it should be. Some will try to argue that this is not speaking about being patient with other Believers. Before taking that position, wait until we have looked at the rest of the text.

The two major enterprises in that region were raising of crops and fishing. Even the fishermen were aware of the process of farming. So everyone could understand the analogy given about being patient. “See how the farmer waits” – use that same kind of patience in walking out our Christian faith.

The farmer doesn't plant seeds and then get angry, uptight, upset, or irritable when the crops are not ready to be harvested next week. The farmer “waits for the land to yield its valuable crop” – the farmer doesn't just wait for the spring rains and then expect to reap a harvest. After the spring rains, the farmer then waits for another season of rain to come in the fall, before they begin to expect to reap the harvest.

This has a clear parallel to the Biblical message that there is a former rain and there is a latter rain. As Christians, we need to have the patience to wait for both to be completed. In much the same way that the farmer is patient – being willing to allow the harvest to become fully ready – sometimes the harvest is ready earlier – sometimes the harvest is ready later – but the farmer is willing to wait until it is time.

In like manner, Believers need to be willing to wait until the harvest of souls is ready. Christians need to be patient on the coming return of Jesus. While waiting, Believers need to strengthen our hearts so we can be more resolutely patient.

James – 15 Attitude Check

While the farmer waits, and it can seem like the harvest is taking a long time in getting ready, the farmer knows the harvest WILL COME, and it is closer with each passing day. Christians should remind ourselves that with each passing day, the coming return of the Lord Jesus Christ is nearer today than it was yesterday.

Read James 5:9 and make notes:

Surely the phrase “each other” sounds like it is talking about “other Believers.” In earlier portions of this letter, it dealt with aggressive ill-will, with jealousy and envy, and with malicious slander and defamation of character. Now in this portion of the letter where we are being told to maintain patience – it says we need to be “on guard” and not allow ourselves to “grumble against each other.” The original language used here signifies the kind of complaints that come out of a prolonged testing of our faith.

Not just in this instance, but over a period of time, someone has not done something the way we wanted them to do – someone has not responded the way we wanted them to – so we develop a bad attitude toward this person – maybe even develop a grudge against them.

As Christians, we can't do that. Surely we can't envision Jesus carrying a grudge against someone. Then we can not carry a grudge – we cannot grumble against another person – and then say that we are “like Christ.”

This passage isn't directing us to just think about our personal afflictions, our personal pain and suffering, - but even toward the inconsiderate or unintended vexations we experience because of other Believers.

If we find ourselves starting to grumble against another believer – if we find ourselves beginning to have a bad attitude toward another believer – we need to remind ourselves that we will be judged for our attitude, actions, and words. And we need to be mindful that the “Judge is standing at the door.”

Basically this is saying that the Judge is near – he is not only in the town where we live – he is not just on the street where we live – he is at “our door”. How would we conduct ourselves, if we knew someone was standing at our front door?

Some years ago, when our children were toddlers, we had one child that would throw themselves into the floor – slap the floor with their hands, kick the floor with their feet, shake their head back and forth – and just scream.

James – 15 Attitude Check

My secular job had just moved us to another state. We were looking for a church and trying to get settled into our new community. One evening right after we had eaten supper, this child started throwing one of their tantrums in the living room.

I just laid down in the floor near them and started doing everything they did. When they yelled for me to stop – I yelled for them to stop. When they screamed a little louder – I screamed a little louder.

This went on for several minutes. We had both begin to run down – the front door bell rang. I was getting up off the floor as my wife opened the door. Standing there was a man from the church we had visited the previous Sunday. He asked, “is this a bad time? Should I come back another time?”

I had to ask, “how long have you been at the door?” He responded, “a lot longer than you would probably want me to.” With that answer I had to have him come on in – I felt like I needed to explain what he heard.

I don’t know that this event had any impact on my child – but I’ve been a little more careful since then. I’m pretty sure that I would have handled my child’s temper tantrum a little differently if I had known someone was standing at my front door, listening!

Read James 5:10 and make notes:

There is a Greek word that can be interpreted “patience” – and it's more literal interpretation speaks of “self-restraint that does not easily retaliate.” This is not the Greek word used in this text. The word used here for “patience” – speaks of “not succumbing easily to personal affliction.”

It has nothing to do with the absence of retaliation. It speaks of a person who does not give up – or give in because of affliction that seems to keep coming. It speaks of the person who does not “break down” during extended times of affliction.

This is the kind of attitude that says, “it is still painful today but I will be rescued and I will hold out until that day.” It is the kind of “patience” that has kept many prisoners of war from breaking down in their time of captivity and torture.

The readers of this letter are asked to take the “prophets” as an example. At the time this letter was written, the Jewish community viewed most of the Jewish prophets as martyrs who were to be respected, admired, and maybe even imitated.

James – 15 Attitude Check

This was a very meaningful analogy for the people of that era. Especially the Jewish Believers. They had heard the stories of how the prophets were ridiculed, abused, and rejected – and yet they held true to the Word of God and held true to their mission – even to the point of death when necessary.

Noah worked on the ark about 120 years – he took a lot of ridicule over 120 years of boat building and preaching – and never received even one convert other than his own family.

Moses endured 40 years of non-appreciative people to be faithful to his assigned task of leading his people from slavery to the promise land.

Not only on the Mission Field, but many ministers in this country have endured being mistreated and being treated without respect; and all the while remained faithful. Many Believers have endured pain and ridicule in their homes and have remained faithful.

Read James 5:11 and make notes:

It wasn't the case only in those days – today, we still tend to hold in high regard – the person who perseveres through hardship to do the right thing. Even if we don't agree with their doctrinal position, we tend to respect those who remain faithful to their doctrinal belief in the face of personal ridicule and suffering.

There are many examples of people who remained faithful during hardships – but Job is especially meaningful. We don't know a lot about Job from the O.T. – what we do know tells us about a man who suffered very painful loss – not because he did something wrong and was punished. He didn't suffer because he made some bad business decisions.

Job's suffering was unfair and it was without any cause on his part. Job's suffering was the direct result of someone desiring to make Job suffer – it was willful – it was intentional on the part of an adversary. And Job had not done anything against the one who wanted Job to suffer.

The one wanting to make Job suffer was wanting to do so just because they thought it would make someone else suffer. And this other person is the one that Job's adversary was really trying to hurt.

I am convinced that most of the pain and suffering we Christians experience – is NOT LIKE that which Job experienced. I am convinced that the majority of our suffering is in reality a result of our own doing. Most of our suffering is because of the decisions we have made and the actions we have taken.

James – 15 Attitude Check

It seems that we like to blame someone else – and the devil is always a good one to blame for our suffering – but it is usually we ourselves that causes our own suffering.

Let's try to keep things in context. Do you remember a few verses back? When this passage began – it was about being patient with other Believers. This passage began by exhorting us not to take on a bad attitude toward another believer – exhorting us not to grumble about other believers.

So the better way to understand this verse is to keep it in this context. Even if we think we are suffering because of the decisions and actions of others – if we are sure that we are suffering through no fault of our own – remember Job.

Don't take on a negative attitude – don't grumble about it – just hold on – knowing that Jesus is coming back very soon.

I know of some who went to the mission field with the promise of financial support. After arriving in a foreign land – the financial support just didn't come. These missionaries suffered because of the lack of faithfulness on the part of other believers.

I can tell you true stories of Pastors – and their families who have suffered because the congregation simply wasn't faithful. I can also tell you stories of congregations who suffered because their pastor wasn't faithful.

It is all too common that a Believer suffers – not because they have done wrong. They suffer because of the decisions and actions of others. Yes, it is very common today – so what does this mean?

How would you act if you knew one of the Church Leaders was standing outside your front door? Would you speak differently to those in your house? Would you use a different tone of voice? Would your actions be different? Would you tune your TV to a different channel?

This is something that most Christians do not appear to consider. Jesus is not at some far distant location from which we know He will one day return. Jesus is standing at our front door. His "return" isn't that He is coming back from afar. His "return" is that He is manifesting Himself so that we "can see" Him – and it is for the purpose of taking us home with Him.

While Jesus is at our front door – what is He hearing? Does he stand there and listen as we grumble and complain about the way these other Christians are doing – or failing to do? Does he stand there and listen as we express our really bad attitude we have developed toward other Christians?

James – 15 Attitude Check

The man who stood outside our door the night I laid on the floor and screamed with my child – he confessed that he debated about even ringing the door bell. He said he thought about just going back to the church and telling the pastor that there was some kind of big fight going on inside the house. I'm glad he did ring the bell. I'm so glad I got the opportunity to explain what was going on.

We became friends. His family and mine fellow-shipped together on many occasions after that. But what if he had just turned and left because of what he was hearing? Both his family and mine would have missed some really good times.

What is Jesus hearing – as he stands – not at the front door of our house – but as he stands at the door of our life?

If God seems to be taking a little longer with some Believer – in the maturing process – or in the refining process – do we grumble about that? If God allows some Believer more time before He ask them to lay down some sin that He asked us to lay down right away – do we grumble about that?

This passage from the letter of James gave us three examples of waiting for reward:

.1.

The farmers who wait for the crops – and some seasons are just slower than others.

.2.

The prophets who were trying to help others – but were rejected, mocked, ridiculed and sometimes even killed.

.3.

And then there was Job – There he was just worshipping God and minding his own business – when we came under attack and suffered painfully – unfairly and un-called for.

Which one of these examples most closely describes your long-suffering? And what is the evidence of this?

James – 15 Attitude Check

Behold! Jesus stands at the door and he knocks. If we let Him in, He will eat with us and will fellowship with us. Earnestly – tenderly – Jesus is calling – but what is He hearing while he knocks and calls?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this lesson and bring with you to discuss with the group the next time we meet:

James – 15 Attitude Check

(this page for additional notes)

James – 16 What We Say

In the first chapter of this letter of James – one of the things stressed was controlling the tongue. We were told Believers should be “slow to speak.” And we were told that the religion of the Believer was worthless if we do not keep a tight rein on our tongue. Here in the very last chapter of this letter – we get back to how we talk.

Read James 5:12 and make notes:

“Above all” – whatever else we may do in our efforts to live a righteous life – whatever it is that we keep ourselves from doing – whatever it is that we make sure we do – Above All Of That – Above Everything Else – make sure that we do not swear. For Believers, controlling our speech is of very high importance.

There are many who believe this verse is a command to refrain from making any oaths. There are those who use this verse as a basis for saying they cannot “swear to tell the truth” in a court of law – to be faithful to their doctrine – they will “promise” to tell the truth, but they will not swear.

The Greek word used here is the word “omnu” (om-noo-o’) – Which means “to affirm, to promise, or to threaten with an oath.” While I respect those who are faithful to what they believe – in this case I believe it is an unwarranted battle over semantics.

“To Swear to tell the truth”, such as in a court of law is saying nothing other than “Promising to tell the truth”. Since most courts now use a different phrase – such as “promise” – it really isn’t much of an issue in our current society.

Here is the more direct problem - “do not swear — not by heaven or by earth or by anything else.” The instruction is not simply “do not swear” – But it is “do not swear BY something.” If a person “swears by heaven” – we have to ask ourselves, how much control over heaven do they have? If they have no control over heaven, then how valuable is that “swear”?

What if I promise to put up all the assets of the local bank as collateral for a loan? Since I have no control over the bank; how valuable is my promise? It would be worthless!

If we “swear by earth” – how much control over the earth do we have? If we cannot control the earth – then such a “swear” has no value! And what about the “nor by anything else”? Just how much – or how many things – can we actually control? If we cannot control a thing – a person – a part of nature – then “swearing” by that thing, person, or part of nature is of no value.

The last part of this verse says we are to “let our yes be yes” and our “no be no”! We have already been instructed in this letter not to bear false witness – not to slander another person – not even to grumble about them.

James – 16 What We Say

It isn't meant to be funny – but if we stop and evaluate carefully the great majority of the conversations we hear in a typical day – if we simply started eliminating this kind of language – there wouldn't be nearly as much being said.

If Christians left out the grumbling and the slandering, We would indeed say a lot less. This is a good place for us to stop and consider, Why is it that so many Christians today believe they need to say things like “honestly” when they are telling something? Why do we need to say, “this is the truth”?

It is because we are not obeying the instructions in the letter of James – we say way too much – and we do not control our tongue – that's why.

Read James 5:13 and make notes:

This verse seems too simple for most people to even slow down and meditate upon. And yet it is a valuable follow-up to previous instructions to “control our tongue”.

Previously we have been instructed in what NOT to say. Now we get instruction on what we are to say.

Is any one of the Believers in trouble? – if so, we should not grumble and develop a negative attitude – instead we should pray.

For those of us who have tried it – we can testify from personal experience – Praise and Prayer are marvelous and great comforters. I may not be able to explain why they are – but I can testify from personal experience that they indeed are very effective comforters.

Is any one of the Believers happy? – If so, we should express our happiness – we should not hold it in – and the appropriate way to express our happiness – is by singing songs of praise.

The best way to speak in our times of trouble ? – that is prayer. The best way to speak in our times of happiness ? – that is singing praise.

Read James 5:14 and make notes:

James – 16 What We Say

Is any one of the Believers sick? – In direct opposition to what some people teach today – true Believers do sometimes get sick and need healing. If we are sick – the appropriate thing to do is to call for the elders of the church to pray over us – to anoint us with oil – and to do this in the name of the Lord.

In the culture of the day when this letter was written – the anointing of a sick person was very common. The problem was that many of those doing the anointing were using a wide range of charms and other pagan devices while they cited incantations of one sort or another.

The Holy Spirit – through James – is telling us that Believers are not to use such worldly devices – and we certainly don't need incantations. Believers need to use oil – because that is an excellent representation of the Holy Spirit – and we need to do so in the Name of the Lord. For all healing is found in Jesus Christ – and none other.

Does anyone recognize that this too is an instruction to control the tongue? Our speech should contain none of the pagan sayings. Our speech – maybe even especially in times of sickness – needs to invoke the Name of Jesus.

This instruction in no way is saying don't go to the doctor or to use medicines. It is saying two things:

- . 1. Prayer for healing is to be first resort - Not last resort.

- . 2. Anointing with oil in the Name of the Lord -
Not incantations, or charms, or crystals, etc.

Read James 5:15 and make notes:

This is a very valuable verse. It needs to be included in several different teachings. But for today, let's try to keep it in the context of this letter – and in the context of these instructions to control our tongue.

For those who had become accustomed to seeing and hearing the pagan method of anointing the sick – the simple instruction to anoint only with oil – and to invoke only the name of the Lord – could leave them feeling like they are missing something.

James – 16 What We Say

The Holy Spirit assures us that the “prayer offered in faith WILL make the sick person well.” The Lord WILL raise up the sick person who has been prayed for in faith. What a marvelous promise! But there is a second promise – and that is “IF” this sick person has sinned – they “WILL Be Forgiven.”

I don’t want to get onto too many side roads, but let’s point this one side road out. The use of “IF” here – stands as part of the evidence that every person who gets sick is not sick as a direct result of having sinned. This instruction is to those who are sick. And it says “IF” this sick person has sinned”.

Read James 5:16 and make notes:

It is important that we do not disconnect this verse from the rest of the text. We are still talking about controlling our tongue. We have instructions in not only what we should NOT say – but we have instructions on what we “should” say.

We should in fact “confess our sins to each other” – and then we should pray for each other. Part of the speech of a Believer should include confessing our sins. Part of the speech of a Believer should include praying for others.

“The prayer of a righteous man” – what is a righteous person? A “righteous” person is a person who has no sins being held against them. A “righteous” person is one who has all their sins forgiven.

A word study in this verse reveals that the “prayer” offered up by the “righteous” person – is “powerful in operation” and it “avails much in its working”.

This is a good text to hold out to the Elders – or other leaders of any local church. If we as leaders in the church want our prayers to be “powerful” – if we want our prayers to “avail much in its working” – then we need to be “righteous” – that means we need to make sure that we have no sins on our record book. Since as fleshly beings, we do sin – that means we need to make sure we stay “confessed up” – as soon as we realize we have sinned – we need to confess it and receive forgiveness.

But this isn’t just about Elders – or church leaders is it? This instruction is to Believers – all Believers. We, as Believers, need to make every effort to confess our sins and to receive forgiveness for a sins – so that we can offer up “powerful and effective” prayers.

James – 16 What We Say

Read James 5:17-18 and make notes:

The Holy Spirit guided James to use an example from the Old Testament – a person who had demonstrated “powerful and effective” prayer. Elijah “prayed earnestly” and his pray was answered. Has it dawned on anyone that the prayer offered by righteous Elijah affected an entire nation.

A word study on this text reveals that a literal translation of “prayed earnestly” would be that he “prayed with power”. And isn’t that what we are told is the kind of prayer that goes forth from a righteous person. What little common sense I have tells me that there had to be many other people who were praying for rain at that time. And yet, the prayer of “one” person was answered in opposition to the prayers of many. It wasn’t until the prayer offered by the “righteous” person went forth that the rains returned to the nation. What a wonderful example of the effective and powerful prayer of the righteous person.

Here are three things we should share with New Believers from this text:

Number 1:

Satan works to make us believe that we are somehow “unworthy” of having our prayers answered. Did you notice in V17 that we are told that Elijah was “a man just like us.”? Elijah was not some bigger than life miracle worker. Elijah was just a man – Elijah was just like us – with one difference from most Christians today. Elijah kept his sins confessed and his forgiveness up to date.

If we will do the same – then we can experience the same kind of results when we pray. Every Believer CAN – have their prayers answered – and every Believer can experience powerful and effective prayers.

We find an interesting statement in a letter written some time in the 600’s A.D. It was written by one of the most revered and respected Bible scholars of that day – Braulio. He spent many hours each day in prayer – he turned away from items of luxury. He lived a life of simplicity while he was very generous to the poor. Braulio wrote:

“it would be a long and unpleasant task to reveal my sinful ways to you and to tell you everything in detail....It must suffice for me to reveal to your most holy mind that I am not what you believe, ...though I beg you to pray to God that He might make me what you believe.”

James – 16 What We Say

This level of humility is hard to find in contemporary Believers. We stress being a “child of the King” to the extreme and seem to think we can do no wrong. It is probably not wisdom to go around telling everyone everything wrong that we have done. Especially if it has already been confessed and forgiven.

If we sin against another person – We need to confess to that person and ask their forgiveness. If we sin against God – Then we need to confess to God and ask His forgiveness. There are some sins that need to be confessed privately. And there are some sins that need to be confessed publicly. But ALL sins need to be confessed and repented of. And the unwillingness of Believers today to admit and to confess our sins is a major roadblock to revival.

Number 2:

The instruction for the sick to call for the Elders – really wasn’t meant to become some law that only those in the office of an elder could pray for the sick. It was instead an instruction to call for those who are mature in the faith rather than calling for the “babes in Christ.” Those who are young in their walk with the Lord may find themselves wavering as they pray for the sick person.

If we are sick, and we have asked for prayer – we want the person praying to actually believe and doubt not. If you do not hold any recognized office of leadership in the local church – But you have the faith to believe for healing - You can – and should – pray for the sick.

Number 3:

Believers need to be careful about saying “too much”. It should be enough that the Scriptures say so, but there are a couple of practical reasons why. The more we say – the more likely we are to say something wrong. The more we talk – the less we are able to listen.

And here is something else to consider – If Christians would be faithful to refrain from lying, bearing false witness, slander, and grumbling – I’m saying if we would – then not one of us would need to take an oath – because our lifestyle would have already established that “our word is our bond.”

If a person lives a life of truth, honesty, and integrity – what will an oath add to their testimony? – it will add nothing – for their word is already true.

If a person lives a life of lies, dishonesty, and lacks overall integrity – what will an oath add to their testimony? – it will add nothing – for their word is not true. Their word cannot be trusted.

No oath – no promise – no pledge – no amount of swearing can nullify the life we live. The lifestyle we live amid and before our community is the most powerful testimony that can be given. And it is the most powerful testimony we give.

James – 16 What We Say

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this lesson and bring with you to discuss with the group the next time we meet:

James – 16 What We Say

(this page for additional notes)

James – 17 The Fallen Believer

It seems all of the epistles in the New Testament end with a direct message to the hearers. Sometimes it is a greeting, sometimes a warning, and sometimes a message of encouragement. In this letter of James, we find a direct message to the hearers – one of encouragement and an assurance of reward.

In this letter the Holy Spirit, through James, has given us instructions on how Christians should live our lives. We have been given instructions on what NOT to say. And we have been given instructions on what WE SHOULD say.

In this closing statement, I believe we are given, not only a word of encouragement – but a reason as to WHY we should live the life called for in James – and WHY we should take control of our tongue and to be careful as to the kinds of things we say.

Read James 5:19 and make notes:

Speaking to “My brothers” - “If one of you should wander from the truth” – this lets us know that the message is still to Believers, but beyond this - there are a couple of really important things found in this verse.

- A. It lets us know that it is possible for Believers to “wander” from the truth.
- B. It lets us know that a Believer that has wandered from the truth CAN BE brought back to the truth.

Read James 5:20 and make notes:

“Remember This” - There are basically two things to be remembered when another Believer is found to have wandered from the Truth. Whoever turns this wayward brother or sister from error and back to righteousness –

1. Will have saved this person from death.
2. Will have covered over a multitude of sins.

James – 17 The Fallen Believer

It is disappointing to me – that a number of Bible scholars teach from this text that the “sins being forgiven” are the sins of the person who gets the wayward Believer to turn back – rather than the sins of the wayward Believer. This concept places the forgiveness of sins into the arena of being able to do certain good works in order to get our sins forgiven.

I have a real hard time with this teaching. As I study the Word of God – it is incredibly clear that we cannot do enough to get even one of our sins forgiven – if it were not for what Jesus did on our behalf – we would stand eternally guilty for our sins.

Teaching that certain “good works” somehow cancel out certain “bad works” is anti-Christian doctrine. It moves forgiveness from the arena of Grace and puts it back into the arena of Works. The “wages of sin” is death! “Wages” are not good works. “Wages” are not refraining from pleasure.

Aside from the conflict in doctrine – a word study on this text doesn’t give any reason to interpret this text as saying the person leading a wayward Believer back to truth gets their sins forgiven for doing such a “good thing.”

The most simple reading of this text – and that is generally the best one – is to understand that when we can get a wayward Believer to turn back to Truth – they have been brought back from death to life – and that “their sins – though there be a multitude of them – their sins are covered” - by the blood of Jesus. Our sins are not covered by “good deeds”; not covered by “giving up some pleasure”; but covered by the precious – painfully poured out blood of Jesus Christ.

Earlier in this letter of James – we spoke of what a great thing it is when one of us, is able to do something that literally saves the physical life of another person. It is indeed a great thing to deliver a person’s body from the point of death. But Oh How Much Better it is to deliver a person from the point of spiritual death.

Something to consider for a moment:

If we were sick or injured – and our body is hurting – then we go to a doctor and the doctor spends most of their time condemning us and chastising us for getting sick or for getting hurt - how many more times would we go back to see that doctor in the future?

A physician – who has a heart for being a physician – is more interested in delivering a person from the point of their “dis-ease” and “dis-comfort” – than they are interested in condemning the person for allowing themselves to get sick or hurt.

A person – who has a shepherd’s heart – one who dearly loves the sheep - is more interested in bringing back the wayward sheep than they are in condemning or chastising the sheep for wandering. Consider the sheep that wanders away from the flock and gets lost; either accidentally or on purpose. They see the shepherd coming to find them. They are probably somewhat happy to see someone they know.

James – 17 The Fallen Believer

But suppose the shepherd begins to fuss at the sheep when he finds it – maybe even gives the sheep a good beating – threatening to do worse if they ever wander off again. What do you think is going to happen – if the sheep, even by accident, should wander away again? When they see the shepherd approaching – will they call out to the shepherd – or will they try to hide from the shepherd?

The Church – from its very beginning – was intended By God to be a redemptive brotherhood. The Church was never intended to be a “judge” – or a “jury” – and certainly not an “executioner”. It has always been God’s intention that the Church would be an agent of getting a wayward brother or sister to “turn” from error and to “turn” back to truth and righteousness. It has always been God’s intention that the Church would be about the business of “restoring.”

This instruction – like those that have preceded – is not only for the Pastor, Elders, or other people who have a title or office within the Church. This instruction is to All Believers. It is the expected duty of every Believer to try to lead another Believer back into Truth when we discover they have gone into error. Look again at verse 19 – it states clearly “we should” bring them back!

I suppose it is a part of my personality makeup – I do not cry easily – but I have been brought to tears more than once – when I have had to deal with a situation where a local church that is strong on “winning the lost” – then one of their own falls into error – they cut them off and cast them aside. If it makes me cry – I know it must break God’s heart.

I have had a number of occasions where I have discovered a brother or sister in the Lord has fallen into sin. Some have begun to have an affair – Others have begun to get intoxicated on drugs or alcohol – a few times it has been some other sin.

I have gone to that person and simply asked them if what I have come to know is true – and then I ask them “what can I do to help you get back into a right relationship with the Lord?”. I don’t condemn them – I don’t chastise them – while I do not say what they are doing is acceptable – because it is not – I do not spend my time beating them up.

The Church and the World we live in needs our help today – for there are so many who have turned away from the Truth and have gone into error – some into error of doctrine – but many into error of lifestyle.

The invitation is for individual Believers to join together in this ministry of trying to bring those in error back into the Truth – without condemning them or chastising them. It is so needed today, for Believers to come together as a collective Church Family to help the local Church so that it will never condemn those who are fallen – but instead we will be about the business of restoring in Love.

James – 17 The Fallen Believer

Believers need to help make sure their local Church is more interested in “restoring” than we will ever be in condemning or chastising. Believers need to take an active role in turning those in error either “to the Truth for the first time” Or “returning them to the Truth from the error to which they have turned.”

It simply is not acceptable to sit on our “blessed assurance” and say “well, I’m sorry to hear that Bob has gone into error.” It isn’t acceptable for us to go on about our way and say, “I sure hope he comes back to the Lord soon.”

Believers need to commit to reach out to those who have gone into error and help them come back to the Truth.

Make a list of things you can do (you are willing to do) to help bring Believers back from paths of error.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this lesson and bring with you to discuss with the group the next time we meet: