

The book of James is a wonderful book in God's word. It is very direct in what it has to say. It talks about many subjects such as riches and the danger of being rich, temptations, the tongue, and many other topics applicable to our daily Christian life. I believe you will enjoy the study of James.

We like to begin our study of each book by talking about the author. Please understand the Bible was not written by man, but was written by God. Man was simply an instrument in the hand of God to transfer His words from God's mouth to paper. There is disagreement about the number of James' in the Bible. We know there are two apostles by the name of James spoken of in Matthew Chapter 10. One is James the brother of John, son of Zebedee. The other apostle bearing the name is "James the less," spoken of in Mark 15:40. He was called the less perhaps to distinguish him from the other James because he may have been shorter. He is the son of Alphaeus and Mary, sister of Virgin Mary.

Some writers and Bible scholars introduce a third "James" because of the places, such as Galatians 1:19, which speak of "James, the Lord's brother." Joseph and Mary had children, one named James, after the conception and virgin birth of the son of God. The particular James whom God used to write this precious book is disputed.

Not only are we concerned with the writer of James, we are concerned with whom the book is written to. Fifteen times the word "brethren" is mentioned in this book. For sure, from verse one we find it is written to dispersed Jews, that being the 12 scattered tribes. James is written to instruct and comfort scattered and persecuted *Christian Jews*. It is not written to a specific group in a specific place such as the churches to whom Paul wrote. Therefore, the book of James is called a general epistle.

James is thought to be the earliest or first epistle to Christians after the church was formed at Pentecost. The believers were scattered. They were afflicted for the sake of the gospel. They were afflicted for professing belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Many lost their homes. Many lost their opportunity for employment. Places of employment likely had signs, such as "Christians need not apply," hung over the door. The people were persecuted, afflicted, and disowned. In order to survive, they fled Jerusalem to other parts of the world.

(1:1-2)

We find in verse two a strange statement, "*count it all joy.*" James

is admonishing the persecuted believers to be joyous when they are tempted. Now is a time to explain the word “temptations.” There are two varieties of temptations in God's word. One is the trials that God places on his children that they may grow in the Lord. The other kind of temptation is enticements of Satan placed before believers to entice them to sin. In later verses we will speak of the second kind of temptation, but for now we speak of the first kind, that is, those trials that God places on Christians.

God arranges tests for his children. God does not arrange sinful enticements in a Christian's life. Those are provided by the Devil. God does not dangle sin before a Christian's eyes to see whether or not he will accept it. Such a temptation is the Devil's doings.

Let us look at examples of the two types of temptations. First, Job was tested with God's permission. He was strengthened by the trial. On the other hand, David was enticed by the Devil to sin by taking his neighbor's wife. Both were tempted but of a different sort. Please make sure you understand the two types of temptations.

In this verse two we are concerned with the trials and tests that God places upon the believer. James instructs the believers to be *joyous* God sends us a trial. The apostle Paul did this very thing, that is, he rejoiced when temptation came, for we read in Romans 5:3-5 *“And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience 4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope: 5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”* We remember the occasion when Paul and Silas sang while in jail. Peter and John rejoiced when they were beaten for their stand for Christ before the council.

The Bible does not instruct us to cry, quit, feel sorry for ourselves, or any such thing when God tries us through temptations. We are to do as this verse- *“count it all joy.”* Admittedly, this is difficult. Who wants to be joyous when trials come? Who wants to be happy when things are not going well in life? It is not human nature to enjoy tests and trials. We prefer crying and whining. Yet, God has a reason for the temptation and trials. That reason is found in verse three.

(1:3)

The reason for God sending trials upon the believer is in regard to patience. You cannot buy Godly patience in a box at Wal-Mart. I wish we could! Patience means “cheerful endurance.” In other words trials, tests, and temptations that come our way sent from God are for the purpose of developing more patience in the believer. I say to you it is impossible to have Godly patience without first experiencing

trials. I repeat, Godly patience cannot be bought from the store. You may ask, what is the value of patience? Why do I care if I have patience as a Christian? Let us look at verse four for the answer.

(1:4)

Here we find patience produces something good in our life. It matures to a point of being “perfect and entire.” Perfect refers to completeness. No person can be complete as a Christian until they first experience trials. Do you want to remain a baby all your saved life? At this writing, I have a seven month old grandson. He cannot yet walk. We believe in a few months he will be walking. If he is not walking in five years we will be very concerned. I give this illustration to make a point; some folk have been saved 10 years, and they cannot yet walk as Christians. However, that does not seem to concern anyone. We should be alarmed! It concerns me as a Pastor and preacher of the gospel. It is extremely disappointing when a person saved five or 10 years or 15 years cannot yet walk. It is time to take that child to a specialist!

Patience, which produces a complete Christian, comes only by trials as stated above. It only comes by personal experience. You can't read about it in a magazine. You can't watch it on television. You cannot observe it in the life of other Christians. You have to experience it in your own life. Let me share this example: when it is time for my grandson, who cannot walk, to learn to walk I cannot have him read a book about how to walk. I cannot show him pictures of his grandfather walking and say to him “look at grandfather in this picture and walk like he's walking.” I cannot direct that grandson to look at other babies who are walking and say to him “do like they are doing.” None of these things will be beneficial. This grandson must experience some falls, knocks, bruises, and scratches until one day he can walk. He will learn to walk by temptations.

The same is true in the Christian life. When a person is saved, he is immediately a new creature, but he is not immediately an adult in Christ. He is a baby in Christ. He cannot walk, but must learn to walk by experiences with God, and these experiences come in the form of trials, tests, and temptations. A Christian can never be an adult until he becomes complete and entire, and he will never become complete and entire until he goes through temptations. Temptations is the learning method that God uses to bring about Christian growth. Furthermore, it is important to say growth takes time.

How long have you been saved? If you have been saved five years, you are probably still growing rapidly in the Lord. If you have been saved 10 years, you are still growing but you are getting closer to

adulthood than when you were five years old in the Lord. It takes time to become an adult Christian. But may I say it does not take 40 years. Neither does it take 30 years. A person who has been saved 30 or 40 years and is still a baby is deformed.

So, is it a joyful thing to you when trials come? Do you get mad at God? Do you get mad at the preacher? Do you get mad at the Christian family? Do you whine and complain? Do you accuse God of being unfair to you? Your child is not sick because you made the child sick. You were not the reason you lost your job at the factory. You were a good employee who worked hard. Such trials as sickness in our family and financial challenges may be sent of God to train us in patience. In fact, the steps of a righteous man are ordered of God. Are you a righteous man? Are you living close to God? If so, God will send trials your way because he loves you, and he wants to see you grow as a Christian.

I previously read to you what Paul had to say in Romans 5:3-5 about tribulations. Now, let's look at Peter, who also agreed with James, as we read in I Peter 1:7 "*That the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold...*" Would you rejoice if you found a lump of gold? You certainly would. Yet, when God sends a golden trial our way we feel sorry for ourselves, we threaten to quit, and we do everything *but* rejoice!

(1:5)

James is filled with many topics. Now we transition from talking about temptations to talking about wisdom. Verse five is truly one of the great promises in the Bible. This promise is the kind of promise we read and than rejoice. Yet, at the same time we must feel a responsibility to not be spiritually ignorant when God has made such a promise as is contained in verse five. I do not believe, with this promise of verse five, ignorance will be an excuse at the judgment. I do not believe we can stand before God and say "I did know what to do." I do not know all things. No man does. Yet, I do know someone who does know all things.

What a tremendous promise that God would promise us to just simply ask him if we desire to have knowledge. Colossians 2-3 "In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." I do not know how to be a good pastor, good father, good husband, or good grandfather. Yet, I have the promise that I can ask God, and He will enlighten me. How many times do we stumble through life filled with uncertainty about our direction? We need not do that. God will supply all the wisdom we need to get through this life.

I enjoy reading I Kings 3:5-12. You may turn there and read this

passage. When Solomon was appointed king of Israel, God gave him a blank check. That is, Solomon was able to fill out the check and write it for anything he wanted. It would seem Solomon would ask God to kill his enemies, to make him rich, or to give him a long life. However, Solomon asked for none of these things. He simply asked God for “wisdom.” God granted his wish and more. God gave him wisdom beyond any man who has ever lived. Additionally, God granted Solomon things he did not ask for because his request for wisdom delighted God. Too often we look for God’s hand instead of seeking for His mind.

(1:6-8)

Prayer has one very mighty enemy, and that enemy is doubt. Verse six requires that we pray in faith “nothing wavering.” We are described as the waves of the sea driven by the wind and tossed out of control when we pray doubting. God help us all, for we have all prayed doubting at some time. It is not hard to believe God *can*, but it gets difficult to believe He *will*.

Verse seven assures us we will receive nothing if we pray wavering. So many times God would grant us our request if we did not stop Him by doubting Him. It is a sin to doubt God. Furthermore it is the “besetting sin” of many people.

Have you ever met a double-minded person? I know one or two double-minded people. That is, in their behavior they are double-minded. If you see them today they have one personality, and if you see them tomorrow they are someone else. We worry about people who act in such a way. Yet, when we pray asking God to do something and at the same time doubting that he will, we become double-minded Christians. Shame on me, shame on you, shame on every Christian who has ever asked God for something, and yet, in their heart, doubted He would deliver their request.

(1:9–11)

We go now to the topic of riches. Much is said in the Bible about money and material. Poor men are included in the Bible as well as rich men. Job was a rich man. Solomon was a rich man. Joseph of Armathea was a rich man. Lazarus was poor. Apostle Paul was poor as were the other apostles. So, the Bible is a book that addresses all men rich and poor, black and white, bond and free, Jew and Gentile.

The number one reason for folk being in hell today may be *doubt*. The previous verses of this chapter discussed the sin of doubt. I believe the second greatest reason for folk missing heaven and going to hell is material, which we know as “riches.” Riches is not just money. Riches can be real estate, automobiles, stocks and bonds, and many other forms of wealth other than money.

I believe the main lesson from these three verses is the danger of allowing riches to ruin your life. A young rich man met Christ in Mark chapter 10. He ran to Christ, knelt down at his feet, and asked “good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” The Lord replied to him “sell all you have, give it to the poor, and follow me.” The Lord did not say to him that his riches were going to send him to hell. The Lord was simply saying to him that he could see his heart and could see that riches stood between him and his Savior, Jesus Christ. Such is the case with riches. Riches are not wrong. Money is not wrong. We must have money to live and go about our lives. But too often, money becomes a stumbling block in receiving Christ as Savior. The young, rich ruler of Mark chapter 10 was stopped by riches. It is said he went away sorrowful.

I Timothy 6:9 says “*but they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.*” Clearly, Timothy tells us riches hinder men from accepting Christ. Riches are a trap. Riches lead men to whiskey and drugs and fine homes and cars and women and further and further away from Christ. The rich simply fall into temptation. The rich fall into a snare, which is a trap. God can save a rich man as easy as he can a poor man. Yet, seldom does a rich man receive Christ for salvation. He sees no reason to have God in his life. He does not look at eternity, for he is blinded by the present. A man who is poor and has no hope is more prone to look for hope. A rich man's hope is in his wallet and in the bank. He will not look unto Jesus, “the author and finisher of our faith.”

It is easy to lust after the things of the rich. Every person, even

though it may have been in childhood, has at one time dreamed of being rich. I am thankful for my humble upbringing. Growing up we had food to eat and clothes to wear and a roof over our head and that's all we had. That is enough, for we are taught in God's Word "having food and raiment therewith be content." If I had been born into rich circumstances, I may never have known Jesus Christ as my Savior. What a dreadful thought.

Verse 11 warns the rich that heat is coming. The sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, then the grass withereth. The flower falleth. By the heat of the sun the grace, that is, the beauty, of riches perishes. Likewise, "the rich man fadeth away in his ways." I believe there is a reason Christ included a rich man in his explanation of hell in Luke 16. In Luke 16 we have Lazarus the poor man and an unnamed rich man. I believe Christ included the rich man to show us how quickly we can lose it all. He also wanted us to see how distracting riches are.

(1:12-15)

In verse 2 of this chapter, we were introduced to "temptations." In verse 2, temptations refer to God sending trials and tests in the life of an individual. The temptations were for the purpose of "growing" the Christian to a state of maturity.

In this verse 12, temptation means an *enticement* to lure a Christian to sin against God. The Devil has the intention every day to put enticements on the mind of God's people in hopes they will give in and sin against God.

One day the kings were gone to battle in II Samuel 11. King David stayed home and took a nap on his bed in his palace. Why was King David not on the battlefield representing his nation as were other kings? His "lust" led him to stay home and rest. This was the beginning of his problem. He never took hold of his lust and rid himself of it and went to battle as he should have. What is "lust?" Lust is desires of the flesh. I dare say one hundred or more moments of lust come across a person's mind each day. The soul is saved, but not the flesh. The flesh has a broad spectrum of lust that dwell in it. Our flesh is full of lust. Please understand the flesh does not have the ability within itself to please God. Thus, all the flesh can produce outside of being yielded to God is sinful.

Lust is not sin until it "conceives," verse 15. Lust gets pregnant. A desire of the flesh, that is, lust, can cross your mind many times in a single day. Don't panic. Don't jump in the river and drown yourself. Walk in the Spirit and the lust can instantly be defeated, and it then will not conceive and have a baby. When we entertain the evil desire, sin results! King David had the lustful thought of not going to battle.

He had had this thought before, I suppose. But on this day he made a grave mistake- he entertained the thought! He may have said “My, my. That bed looks good and I feel so bad. I will just stay here and rest and let my captain take care of things. I deserve a day off.” Oh no! His lust conceived! Again, a momentary desire of the flesh is natural; just don’t entertain it or it becomes sin.

By staying home from battle, David’s lust conceived. He is in for more trouble than he ever dreamed. His “conceived lust” led him to go to the balcony to see if he could catch a little glimpse of his neighbor’s wife. He never got up off that bed and walked to that balcony and spotted that woman by accident. His lust is out of control and it led him there! This is not Bathsheba’s first bath. This is not the first time she has bathed in this particular tub. She likely had only one tub. I submit that David had seen her bathe before and kept his lust under control. How can you live beside someone and not know they take a bath in a tub on the porch every other day?

King David wanted his neighbor's wife. Why today and not yesterday or last week? On this day his lust conceived, that is, got out of control. It will happen in your life and my life unless we walk in the Spirit. Gal 5:16 reads *“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.”* Your lust won’t get pregnant. Lust will never go away. But lust does not have to conceive. When it does, you are the daddy- not God.

King David told the servant, “go get Bathsheba and bring her to me.” David is out of control. The rest is history, for we know the awfulness that followed.

King David missed a blessing this day. Verse 12 promises blessedness upon the man or woman who resists temptation. Joseph was in the house of Potiphar. Potiphar’s wife desired Joseph. She gave him the perfect invitation- “come, lie with me.” Joseph refused. She tore his garment as he struggled to free himself from her. What was Joseph doing? He was resisting temptation, something we all should do. God blessed Joseph for resisting temptation. God promised He would in verse 12. He became ruler over the kingdom. If he had fallen to Potiphar’s wife, most likely he would have lost his life. Look at the tragedy that would have resulted and the hardship unto the Hebrew people.

Look at verse 15. Lust conceives and brings forth a child. Lust’s children are always born with a disease. The disease is known as sin. The babies born to lust never live. They die from sin disease. The sword never departed from King David’s house. Death kept ringing the doorbell. The baby birthed by Bathsheba died. Later one of

David's sons killed another of his sons. The great son of David, Absolam, hanged in an oak tree caught by his hair. Joab cast 3 darts into his heart, and he died. David's chief of staff, Ahithophel, committed suicide. Babies born of lust die.

(1:16)

Err means "go astray, or wander." I have seen the words of this Bible come true too many times to believe it is but foolishness and dangerous to disobey it. James seems to be raising a flag and waving it in this verse. He is crying "Don't stray from the Word of God." Don't stray from the leadership of the Holy Ghost. Stay with God and God's people.

Furthermore, verse 14 says every man is "drawn away of his own lust." Therefore, Brother James says don't allow that to happen to you. I can't lead you away from God. You can't lead me away from God. My lust can lead me away. If you ever quit serving God, for goodness sakes don't start naming names. Look in the mirror. If you are not back tonight, look in the mirror. God fixed a system such that the Devil nor his demons nor all hell can stop you from serving God. When we stop, look in the mirror.

(1:17)

Do you believe "*every good gift and every perfect gift is from above?*" I do. Don't err from this truth. The Devil gives the gift of beer, whiskey, meth, pornography, murder, robbery, rape and thievery. Most of all, he introduced trouble to all humanity. God gives us good things such as precious babies, moms and dads, church, Sunday School, boys and girls, food, air to breathe, homes to live in, and shoes to wear. Above these things comes joy, peace, happiness, safety, love, fellowship and the blessed Holy Spirit. God is good.

He cannot help but be good all the time for in him is no "variableness." Variableness is akin to the word "fickleness." Do you know someone fickle? Sure you do. One day they seem to be your friend. The next day you are not sure. One day they can't do enough for you and the next day they can't do enough against you. This is not God. When the ravens finished their trips to feed Elijah, he sent Elijah to a widow's house who had a meal barrel. What if God was fickle? One day we would be filled and the next day hungry. One day we would have air to breathe and the next day we would suffocate.

He never stopped knowing the Hebrew children in the furnace. He knew them before, while they were in, and after they came out. Same God. Malachi 3:6 "*For I am the LORD, I change not;*"

He is the same every time I talk to Him. God has no shadow. Do

you know why? He never turns. He always looks the same direction and that is in the direction of His children.

(1:18)

II Timothy 1:9 *“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began”* I am saved because it was God’s decision to provide man a salvation plan through His only begotten Son Jesus Christ. I have nothing invested in salvation. I would have helped God save me if He had asked, but He never asked. He devised the plan of salvation and never even consulted the angels. Not one seraphim offered his opinion or had any input.

It was entirely by God’s will that man’s salvation was devised. He was not compelled to save humanity. There was never a prayer meeting to pray for God to give man a plan of salvation. It was “of His own will.”

He begat us spiritually. My mother birthed me. My father fathered me. But God alone begat me into the family of God. The Baptists didn’t even help God save me. Five brothers and sisters never helped God save me. I sure never helped him. I was bankrupt, locked up, shook up, and about to give up. That is when God saved me- when I gave up. Sinner, all you have to do to be saved is turn yourself in. The Holy Ghost will make sure you know you are guilty. It is up to you to yield your soul unto God for salvation.

(1:19-20)

When we began our study of James, we said James covers many topics. In verse 19, for example, he covers the topic of hearing, speaking, and anger. Concerning hearing, we are instructed to be swift to hear. Hebrews 5:11 says *“of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.”* Sometimes when others speak our ears are not awake. We say, in jest, of one another that we have “selective hearing.” When we want to hear, we hear just fine. When we don't want to hear something, we have the amazing ability to turn off our hearing.

We will have quite a discussion on speaking and the tongue in chapter 3. Here we are told to be *“slow to speak.”* If we survey our lifetime and look back upon those things we have said that we wish we had not said, we will find most have been said out of *swiftness*. We wish we had taken a deep breath before we spoke. Often our tongue outruns our brain. When it does, we speak when we later wish we had kept our mouth shut. God is polite. He won't talk while others are talking. When we shut up, He can speak. Hebrews 12:25 reads *“see that you refuse not him that speaketh.”* Ecclesiastes 3:7 reads *“...a time to keep silence, and a time to speak...”* Elisha was on the mountain with God in I Kings 19. If Elisha had been talking, He would have missed the still small voice of God. Psalm 46:10 reads *“be still and know that I am God.”*

“Slow to wrath” is James's next admonition to us in verse 19. Not only do we sometimes speak too quickly, we sometimes say things in haste that we wish we had not said. Often, we are regretful, but it is too late. Many men are in prison today for becoming wrathful in a moment. They broke the law. In a moment of anger, they murdered a man. Now they are paying a heavy price. Our lack of patience is a great enemy. Our temper is a great enemy. James further describes wrath in verse 20. We are instructed that the wrath of man is not in tune with the righteousness of God. I have never pitched a “fit” that pleased God. Neither have you. I am always sorrowful that I did not take my time and be reasonable rather than be wrathful. God has let me regret my wrath many times. He has punished me by letting me relive it.

Let us look at these key verses regarding wrath from God's Word:

Psalm 37:8 *“cease from anger, and forsake wrath”*

Proverbs 14:29 *“he that is slow to wrath is of great understanding”*

Proverbs 27:3 *“A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool’s wrath is heavier than them both.”*

Ephesians 4:26 *“let not the sun go down upon your wrath.”*

(1:21)

Let us get the definition of a couple of words before we begin our discussion of this verse. “Superfluity” means abundance. Engrafted means implanted.

Lay apart all filthiness and naughtiness. I wish when God saved a soul, He also saved the flesh. He does not, and if He did, He would have to take us to Heaven from the altar. After salvation, the desires of the flesh remain. Therefore, Christians are continually involved in warfare between the Spirit and the flesh. I will use temper as an example. No, you do not automatically lay aside your temper when you get saved. However, after you are saved, God gives help to reign in the temper and control it.

So, Brother James asks us in verse 21 to quit filthiness. After you are saved, you are to put aside things that are dirty in the eyes of God. That may include dirty magazines, dirty television shows, dirty language, and dirty thoughts.

James further instructs us to lay apart naughtiness. We used to accuse our children of being naughty. God’s children can be naughty as well. Why did James tell us to quit being naughty? A child that is being naughty is not necessarily being mean. Yet mama and daddy still don’t like their behavior when they are naughty. Maybe they are just picking at another child. They are not harming the other child, but they are sure getting on its nerves. God’s people sometimes get on each other’s nerves. When we are filthy, we bother God. When we are naughty, we bother each other. And I have found naughtiness to be preconceived, that is, preplanned. Now, you wouldn’t dare plan out something to do to aggravate somebody would you? We all have.

How do we overcome filthiness and naughtiness? We overcome it by the Word of God. The “engrafted word” is the Word of God dwelling within you. The Bible will get inside you if you will let it. It will move from the table to your soul if you will read and receive it. Therefore, it is very good advice Brother James gives us in this verse to *“receive with meekness the engrafted word.”* If you ever quit being filthy and naughty in your flesh, you will do so by overcoming with the help of the Bible. Read it daily. Go a step further and study it daily.

(1:22-25)

These four verses we should be able to quote from memory. *“Be*

doers of the word, and not hearers only.” James speaks to us about taking action on the word of God that we hear. Whether we hear it from a preacher or by reading our Bible does not matter. I have a conviction that I will be judged before God for every message I ever heard. Do you feel this way as well?

I will use tithing as an example. If the Word of God speaks to you and tells you to tithe on what God blesses you with and you do not, you are guilty of “*deceiving your own selves.*” What does it mean to deceive yourself? Look to verse 23. Have you ever looked in a mirror? We all have many times looked into a mirror. What if a person looks into the mirror and says to himself “I need to shave.” However, he does not pick up the razor but simply turns and walks away. A lady looks into the mirror. The mirror says to her “you need to comb your hair.” But she turns and walks away. Both the man and the woman have deceived themselves. They saw a problem and a need. The problem was clear and not confusing. However, they disregarded the instruction of the mirror.

How many times has God’s mirror, the Bible, showed you something? Many times, I suppose. Some people will not read the Bible for they are afraid it WILL speak to them about needs in their life. I have left church after hearing the Word of God and saw myself in the mirror of God’s word and done nothing about what I saw. I kind of believe James is saying when we do that, we make a fool of ourselves. In verse 22 he said “*deceiving your own selves.*” Do you lie to yourself? You say “I would never lie to myself.” However, when you look into the mirror of God’s word and receive instruction and do not heed its correction, you lied to yourself.

Verse 25 explains the person who looks into the mirror of God’s word and sees a need and takes *action*. James says we look into the perfect law of liberty. James is saying to us “your neighbor does not set your standards.” “Hollywood does not set your standards.” “*The perfect law of liberty*” is God’s word, and it is our rulebook. Look into God’s word if you want to know something. Not only do we look into God’s Word, but we are to “continue” in God’s word. It is of no use to have the Bible speak to us and then disregard its instruction. If God’s Word has ever told you to tithe, for example, don’t go back into God’s word a year later and see if it’s changed. A year later the Bible will still say we should tithe.

Some saved people never grow in the Lord. This is sad. Here, James tells us why. They discover a principal in God’s Word. They understand what the Word is saying. Yet, they don’t necessarily agree to it. So, they continually go back and try to reason with the Bible

over the issue. If the Word of God says it, take it and go with it the rest of your life. Quit arguing! Move on to the next principle that God would have you understand. Do you understand what I am saying? Again I say, some never grow as Christians should grow because they cannot accept the first instruction God gave them from His Word. They keep revisiting it. I believe some open the Bible occasionally hoping it will not say what it once said.

The Word of God promises the man who will be a doer of the Word will be “*blessed*” in his doings.

(1:26-27)

Much is said today around the world about religion. The world is a religious place. Religion is behind every tree. If the word “religion” were not in the Bible, I would wish that it had never been invented. You will pick up your newspaper today and perhaps in the headline may be the word “religion.” Everybody on planet earth says, with the exception of a few, “I have religion.” Certainly there are more than 1000 religions. Please understand that there are religions and there are denominations. My religion, to the world, is Christianity. My denomination is Baptist. I disagree with the world’s concept of Christianity, for I believe Christianity is a lifestyle and not a religion. We will not get into that topic further at this time.

Are you religious? How many times have you heard it said “he is a very religious man” or “she is a very religious woman.” I do not find anybody in the Bible called a “religious person.” Yet, James mentions both “religious” and “religion” in these two verses.

So, what is James saying to us? First of all, you are not *religious* if you have a loose tongue. How many of us would be disqualified by that requirement? Do you gossip? Then, you are not religious. Do you talk about your neighbor behind his back? Then, you are not religious. Do you talk about your ex-husband and ridicule him? Then, you are not religious. The Bible does not say you are not “saved,” but it says you are not “religious.” You are deceived in your own heart, and your religion is lying when you cannot control your tongue. You are faking yourself off.

Who, then, is “religious?” Certainly the person with the unbridled tongue is not religious. Who is religious? Religion is **not** a title. It is **not** a label. It is certainly **not** “talk.” Religion is **actions**. “Religious” people aid orphans. Say “amen” or “oh me.” “Religious” people aid widows. They help the helpless in their time of need. If you have 2 coats and meet another man with no coat, the Bible instructs us to give one of our coats to him. That is true religious.

Furthermore, a “religious” person is one who “*keeps himself unspotted from the world.*” Again, I say, you can be saved and not be religious. I will ask you some questions and please be honest: Do you care how you dress before the world? Do you care how you speak before the world? If not, you may be saved, but you are not religious. How can a person say they are saved *and* religious and not care how they represent the heavenly Father on earth? We are his ambassadors. We represent heaven while on earth. Christ is “in us.” Colossians 1:27 reads “...*which is Christ in you, the hope of glory...*” Saved people are also the world’s Bible, that is, sinners read our lives. II Corinthians 3:2 “*Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men.*” So, are you a religious person? Meditate.

(2:1-10)

These nine verses address a very important topic- the topic of partiality and respect of persons. Perhaps every person at one time or another has shown partiality toward mankind. Partiality is to show favoritism to certain individuals and to look down upon other individuals. Partiality is a two-way street. In some instances it is favoring the upper-class, and in other instances, it is to show disregard to the lower-class. We can rest assured that our Savior was not a respecter of persons. We are to pattern our lives after him.

(2:1)

There are many instances in the Bible where respect of persons is shown. In Luke 16, why didn't someone help poor Lazarus? Why was the dog seemingly his best friend? It is human nature to show partiality toward others. Yet, it displeases God. We must battle our flesh and keep it under control lest we are guilty of partiality, that is, respect of persons as spoken of in verse one.

Romans 2:11 "*For there is no respect of persons with God.*" I am not sure we lived on the "right" side of the railroad tracks growing up. Yet, God knew we were there and never overlooked us. We were poor, as most of you were, growing up. The mayor did not know us, but God did. When Christ fed the 5000 men plus their families, He never asked any questions about their status in society. He never asked of even one man that He healed to complete an application to indicate his wealth or his stature in life. Christ showed absolutely no respect of persons. I wish we could all be more like him. In this small town in which we live, respect of persons is very common. I am anxious for heaven, a place where every person is clothed in the same white robe of righteousness and every person looks like the Son of God. There will be no favoritism in heaven; what a good place!

(2:2-4)

Verse two gives us the example of a man walking into an assembly which was, most likely, the synagogue. In today's world, it could be a man walking into the church, the house of God. This man has a gold ring and fine clothes. A second man enters who is wearing "vile raiment." He apparently has no ring, for none is spoken of. A "vile" garment is tattered and soiled.

The man with the gold ring and fine suit of clothes is offered a seat in verse three. The poor man is told to stand. He was given a second option of sitting "*under my footstool.*" How differently these two men were treated based totally on what they were wearing! Both

should have been looked upon as children of God. Both are saved by the same grace. Both have the same Savior. Both are going to the same heaven. But, in this life, they are entirely different people simply because of what they possessed. The man with the “gay clothing” is favored, and the man with the ragged clothes is looked down on.

Verse four presents a question: “*are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?*” The answer is “yes.” Partiality, unfortunately, goes even into the religious realm. I surmise that partiality is more prevalent in the religious circle than in the workplace. Many years ago the big church in downtown Athens built mission churches in the city. That sounds like a good idea. Yet, if you talk to the long-time residents of this city you will find those “mission churches” were built to keep the poor out of the big church downtown. They were not wanted. They might pollute the big church, for their clothes were not good enough. One of those “mission churches” is within sight of the big church. One has to believe what the old-timers are telling us; partiality was rampant.

(2:5-7)

I like God’s system as outlined in verse five. It is well known that, from the beginning, of time there have been more poor people than rich people. What hope then, would mankind have in salvation if God only let the rich come into his kingdom? Masses would be turned away without any hope of knowing Christ as Savior.

God included the poor in his plan for mankind. I am grateful for this. In fact, a poor man can become rich in the eyes of God. How is this? Is it achieved by acquiring money or gold or silver? No, it is achieved by *faith*. A person can be so poor they wear the vile garment of the man in verse two or so poor they sit begging at the rich man’s gate, but they can be rich in God’s eyes through faith.

Verse five not only stresses the importance of faith, but of love also. A man who has great *faith* toward God *loves* God. And it is the man that loves God that will receive the riches of his promises. When we stand before God, there are two things that will determine the reward we receive. One is faith and the other is love toward God. How amazing that a poor man living in the forest in Africa can have more riches than a man in a palace in America. How is this possible? By having abundant faith in God and, therefore, love toward God. We should not concern ourselves with the rings on our fingers or shoes on our feet or the glamour of our clothing. Instead, we ask ourselves the question; how much faith and love do I have toward God? Faith and love toward God can make a beggar a millionaire.

Verse six reminds us that regardless of how rich you are there's probably somebody richer. Who holds most public offices of significance in our world? The answer is "the wealthy." In our country it seems necessary to be a millionaire in order to be President. So, Brother James reminds these Christian Jews that those richer than they can afflict them. There is always going to be somebody richer than you who is capable of afflicting you. The question then is how does it feel to be looked down upon by someone with greater means? How does it feel to sit in a court or public setting and have some wealthy person look down their nose at you? It does not feel good. Therefore, verse six tells us to not forget how we felt when looked down on the next time we are tempted to look down on a person less fortunate.

Would you ever think God would classify the showing of "respect of persons" as blasphemy? That certainly seems to be the case in verse seven. When those in verse six who sit in seats of judgment and look down upon God's people, they are blaspheming the worthy name by which we are called. The man who mistreats someone of lesser stature than he has blasphemed God. Do we really realize that men and women are made in the image of God, and when we mistreat another person we have mistreated the image of God? Ponder that thought. Saved folk are family. When we mistreat one another we are mistreating family and sadden the father God.

(2:8)

Verse eight speaks of the "*royal law*." The Royal law is the highest law, and in this situation, it is the law by which we are to be governed in our treatment of one another. What if every person loved their neighbor as themselves? Do you think we would steal from one another? Do you think we would mistreat one another? Would we argue over where the fence should be built and where the property line is? Men have stayed in conflict for decades arguing over a foot of real estate.

Galatians 5:14 "*For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*" Love your neighbor as yourself and you won't murder him. Love your neighbor as yourself and you won't steal his wife. I have heard many people stand and testify in my lifetime. Multitudes of those people have stood and said "I love the Lord." I am still waiting for someone to stand and testify and say "I love my neighbor." You cannot hate your neighbor and love God. Furthermore, I believe it takes the love of God to love the neighbor. Thus, the Bible says all law is fulfilled when we love one another. Remember, the disciples were sad upon the announcement of our Lord that He was going to ascend back to heaven. They asked

Him “when you are gone how will men know who we are?” What was Christ’s answer? His answer was: John 13:35 “*by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*”

(2:9-13)

Is showing “respect of persons” a sin? Verse 9 answers this question. The answer is “yes.” God is displeased. Verses 10-13 classify showing partiality as “law-breaking.”

I can’t control who my neighbor is. A poor man may live in my area or a rich man. I am commanded by the scripture to treat them the same. If I do not, I am a “transgressor.” I have broken God’s “royal law” which says “love thy neighbor as thyself.”

Most often, it is more liking to the human flesh to look favorably on the “haves” than to look favorably on the “have nots.” This brings us to an important scripture: Romans 12:16 “*Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.*” “Condescend” means to “ride together” or “take off together.” Can you ride in the same saddle or the same car with *any* person in society regardless of their rank? God commands us to do so. Is the flesh conducive to doing so? It is not. We are most comfortable with people our rank. Christ sat down at the well with the lowly *adulteress* woman. He also went home with the *wealthy* and sat at his table and ate. Christ rode in the saddle with all classes of humanity. Yet, He was prince of Glory and King of Kings. Can we do the same? If so, God is well pleased.

(2:14–26)

This group of verses, 14-26, speaks to us about *faith in action*. We will learn a most valuable lesson: faith without works is **dead**, just as a corpse in the cemetery. What good is dead faith? What good is a dead body? We bury dead bodies. It would be just as well to have *no* faith as to have *dead* faith. So, let's get into these verses and learn the importance of faith-in-action.

(2:14)

What is faith? Hebrews 11:1 gives the definition most commonly used for faith: “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*” We have all heard this definition many times. Yet, let us ponder for a moment; do we really know what the verse is saying? Often it comes to our mind that faith is something out in the future. Faith sometimes means to us something that may or may not happen, and if it does happen, it will be by “chance” that it happens. But wait! Hebrews 11:1 calls faith “substance.” Substance is something that is real. Substance is something you can see. The computer I am typing this lesson on I can see. I can touch and feel it. It is substance. It is real. How did we ever get the notion that faith was “pie in the sky” that may or may not exist?

Faith is not only “substance,” but is further defined as “evidence” in Hebrews 11:1. Have you ever been to court? During trials in court, evidence is presented. It is something that can be seen. If, for example, the court is trying a murder case, the gun used in the murder may be presented to the court as evidence against the accused. So, if faith is *evidence*, faith can be *seen*. This leads us to know that faith is not only believing God can, but taking action because we know God will.

Faith is something that is real and can be seen. That “something” is actions, known also in these verses as “works.” If you have no faith, you have no actions or works. If you have “dead” faith, you have no actions or works. It is not possible to be a Christian and not have faith, for a Christian is someone that has actions patterned after Christ’s actions. Christ never sat idle looking up into a tree daydreaming. He was a man in motion, always looking for someone to help or a place to preach or teach. By the way, there a lot of saved people but few Christians.

Let us look at some examples of faith from the Bible. Do you remember a man named Noah? Noah built an ark when it had never rained on the earth. He had never so much as seen a drop of rain, yet

he built a large boat. That is true faith! He *worked* every day with his hands to prepare for a future event. He could have sat down in the shade and passed the time away while looking up in the sky saying “God, you said it was going to rain, and I really believe what you say!” Because he believed God, he got busy sawing lumber for the ark. This is faith in action.

Another good example of faith in action is Abraham’s calling in Genesis 12. Abraham, being the father of faith, was called of God to *arise and go*. Yet, he had no car, no map, no hotel reservations, and no directions. However, when God called him to go, he stood up and went. After he stood up and took one step, God took over. The standing and moving were faith in action. If you desire God to act, you need to act first. Rest assured, God will do His part.

Another example of faith in the Bible is Abraham and Sarah bearing a child at a very old age. God told Abraham and Sarah they would have a baby before Sarah ever became pregnant. What did they do? They rejoiced! The *rejoicing* was an act of faith. The rejoicing was an action indicating they believed God would do His part.

Salvation is an act of faith. Why do we say this? When a sinner repents and asks Jesus into his heart, he has not seen Jesus. The sinner has never even seen a picture of Him. The sinner has never touched Him. The sinner has never spoken to Jesus nor heard His audible voice. However, the sinner puts faith in action by repenting of his sin and asking Jesus into his heart. How is it possible for a sinner to exercise such faith? Does a sinner have faith like unto a Bible-believing Christian? God grants the sinner the faith to be saved, for the Bible says in Romans 10:17 “*So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.*” God knows a sinner does not walk around with faith to be saved in his heart. So, He grants the saving faith to the sinner because the sinner is willing to listen to His Word. Are you saved? You will never be saved until you first become willing to listen to the Word of God, the Bible. Salvation is a precious act of faith. I never even got a piece of paper when I got saved. When a car is purchased, we get a title written on paper. When a child is born, a birth certificate is issued written on paper. When a person graduates from an academic institution, a diploma is issued written on paper. Salvation comes with no paperwork. It is entirely an act of faith.

Many are the examples of faith in God's Word. The Bible is a book of faith. Before we proceed further, let us take a quick look at some of the key verses concerning faith in God's Word:

Hebrews 11:6 “*But without **faith** it is impossible to please him: for he*

that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

Romans 14:23 *“And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of **faith** is sin.”*

Hebrews 10:38 *“Now the just shall live by **faith**: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.”*

(2:15-16)

Verse 15 presents a brother or sister who is both insufficiently clothed and hungry. The need is for clothing and food. Yet, in verse 16 someone says to the person in need “I hope you get warm and stay warm. I know your stomach is growling and there is a gnawing pain inside, so I hope God drops a sandwich out of heaven for you. Have a nice day.” The person goes away still naked and still hungry. Is that Christianity? Is that faith? The answer is **no**. Yet, do we not boast of being men and women of faith? Do we not boast that our religion is *built on faith*?

The man in verse 15 saw the need, and that is the first step. The person had faith, but it was dead faith. Had the person pulled out an extra coat and a biscuit and given it to the person in need, we would have seen *faith in action*. In other words, we would have seen “living faith” as opposed to “dead faith.” Yet, all we saw was a corpse. Who wants to see a corpse? Do we have anybody present who works in a funeral home? Is there an embalmer in the audience?

(2:17)

Faith without works is dead. Don't say “I see that you're hungry and cold, and I hope you get a coat to wear and a biscuit to eat.” When you identify a need and do nothing about it, you are advertising that your faith is dead. This is bad advertising for Christianity. That reflects poorly on the church of the living God. The very foundation of Christianity, that is, faith, is called into question. Don't say “I see a need. The church needs thus and thus. Missions need thus and thus. The grass needs mowing. The floor needs sweeping.” Then, do nothing about the need God let you identify? You're just presenting the *corpse*. Maybe we should all carry around a picture of a person in a coffin. We could walk up to brother and sister Jones and say “let me show you my faith.” Then, pull out the picture of a person in the coffin and show them. We don't take pictures of corpses, that is, of the dead. Yet, we continually speak of our faith, and we are showing nothing more than a picture of a corpse. I'm glad James didn't beat around the bush when he preached, aren't you!

In conjunction with verse 17, look ahead to verse 26. What is

death? Death occurs when the spirit of a person leaves the body. A body without a spirit is dead. A corpse is all that remains. *Faith without works* is like unto a dead body!

(2:18)

Verse 18 reminds me of two men in a contest of sorts. The first man says to the other “you have faith, but I have works.” “Your dad is strong, but my dad is stronger.” Then he says to the man “if you will show me your faith *without* works, I will show you my faith *by my works*.” Who will prevail? The man with *faith only* has nothing to show. Remember, faith cannot be seen, but the ‘works’ of faith *can* be seen. If the man with workless faith is fortunate, he will have in his pocket a picture of a corpse, and he can pull that out and show it.

Have you heard the saying “he talks a good game?” Often, we talk a good game. “Preacher, I am going to do thus and thus.” “Church, you can count on me for I will take care of what needs to be done. I am ol’ faithful.” You may as well keep your mouth shut and just walk around showing a picture of a corpse. The cemetery is filled with saved people who were going to “do something for the Lord” and never did because their faith was dead. When I die, I trust my obituary will not read “preceded in death by his faith.”

(2:19)

How many believe there is *one God*? If that question was asked in every church in this city, I predict that everyone would lift their hand. I believe in God. Americans, at least 75% by the polls, believe there is a God, a divine, ruling power unseen with the human eye. America is supposed to be a nation that is “one nation under God.”

What if we could take a survey in hell and ask the question “how many believe there is one God?” Every hand in hell would be lifted. There are no atheists in hell. So, who believes in God, the living or those in hell, bad people or good people? Verse 19 says “*the devils also believe and tremble*.” What...the devils believe in God? When Jesus cast the demons out of the wild man on the shore of Gadara in Mark chapter 5, Jesus knew the demons and the demons knew Jesus. The demons requested Christ to cast them into the swine rather than destroy them. So, back to the question- who really believes in one God? Is it good people, bad people, living people, people in hell? Let us look to the next verse for the answer.

(2:20)

The person who really believes God *acts* because they believe. The person who says they believe in God but never acts on their belief is described in this verse as a “vain” person. “Vain” in this particular

application means “producing no result.” Have you ever seen a beautiful apple tree filled with lush leaves but never bearing even one apple? This is a vain tree. A saved person who bears no fruit is still saved, but is vain for “producing no result.”

(2:21-23)

In these 3 verses we visit our friend Abraham for a moment. He is the father of faith. I call him the grand-champion of faith. Was Abraham justified by “faith” or by “works?” God called on Abraham to do something seemingly impossible. He was told to offer his son on the altar as a sacrifice. Could you do this? It would take “Abraham faith” to do this. The account of God’s request to Abraham to offer his son Isaac is given in Genesis, chapter 22, which you may read.

Abraham arose early and made the trip to the mount of sacrifice with Isaac and the servants alongside. When the journey ended at the foot of the mountain, Abraham, Isaac, the wood, knife, fire, and rope were carried to the altar on the mountaintop. Did Abraham have faith? Abraham had faith. Was his faith dead? No. The trip to the altar, the knife, fire, wood and rope are his “actions” proving Abraham’s faith was *living* faith, not *dead* faith. Abraham did not sit at home lying in the bed imagining the mountaintop altar. He went there in person, for his faith was alive. Is your faith dead or alive?

Once again we are reminded, by verse 22, that faith without works is dead. By works, our faith is brought to life! No works, the faith remains a corpse. The trip, knife, wood, rope and fire gave life to Abraham’s faith.

Would you like to be a “Friend of God” as Abraham is called in verse 23? God is my friend, but am I God’s friend? Only those with living faith can God call his friend. Hebrews 11:6 *“But without **faith** it is impossible to please him.”*

(2:24)

I will speak for the Baptists- we are scared of the word “works.” We are afraid when we say “works” we are instructing sinners to do “works” to be saved. I have news for you- works are involved in salvation. Sinner, sit on the pew believing God can save you and never do the “work” of repenting and calling on him to save you, and you will go straight to hell. God gave me saving faith when I was a sinner. But I had to exercise, that is, “work” out the faith and bring it alive by kneeling at an altar, repenting of my sin, and asking Jesus into my heart as Savior. When I did that, I was instantly saved. This verse instructs both sinner and saved that *“by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.”* Sinner, take that saving faith God

has given you by the hearing of the Word (Romans 10:17) and turn it into salvation by doing the “work” of repenting and calling on His name (Romans 10:13). Jesus will save you!

(2:25-26)

I love the story of Rahab the harlot. Read about her in Joshua chapter 2. Rahab was justified by the word the Baptists, and others, fear- “works.” What “work” did she do? She carried flax stalks onto her rooftop. That is work. She then led the spies to the rooftop and instructed them to hid in the flax stalks. That is work. She told the pursuers she did not know where the men where. That is work. She placed a cord in her window and let the spies escape by climbing down the cord. That is work. By her “works” she was spared when the Israeli army attacked her home city of Jericho.

Summary: quit saying “I believe God, I have faith,” for you actually don’t unless you get up from your chair of “do-nothing” and get busy doing “works” for the Lord. Our religion is called Christianity because we “work” like Christ “worked.”

(3:1-12)

These 12 verses take us to one of the most interesting but undesirable topics in the Bible. The topic of these verses is the tongue. Tongue has two meanings in the Bible. One, tongue means language. The second meaning of tongue is the object of flesh between your jaw and the roof of your mouth. In this passage of Scripture, tongue is spoken of as the object of the flesh between your jaw and the roof of your mouth. It is not a desirable topic. It is not a popular topic to speak about the tongue. Every person has a tongue. NO man can tame the tongue. Every person has at some time had a “tongue problem.” Let us take a look at these verses and see what we can learn to improve the problem every one of us has experienced.

(3:1)

Masters are common. Masters are the bosses. Servants take orders from the master and do the work. Now, why does everyone want to be master? Because masters speak and servants “listen.” Who wants to be an insignificant listener? Everybody wants to be the speaker giving orders! So, James says “*be not many masters.*” Don't talk all the time. Quit bossing everybody around. We have already understood from James 1:19 that we are to be “*slow to speak*” and “*swift to hear.*” A child of God submissive to the Holy Spirit will be a *good listener*. Show me a good talker, and most likely, that person is not under the subjection to the Holy Ghost.

(3:2)

“*In many things we offend all.*” That is, we offend by our actions and our deeds. We offend by our habits. We offend by our laziness. We offend by our greed. There are many ways in which we offend by our actions and deeds and attitudes.

However, the greatest offender is “words.” Why is this? Because it is simply too easy to speak words. We are all filled with words. Furthermore, James will enlighten us that our tongue is a fire “set on fire of hell.” The most poisonous part of your body is not your hand or your foot or your eye— it is the tongue. “*If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.*” What a powerful statement! And the word “perfect” means complete. It is not possible to be a complete person or a complete Christian until you have the tongue in submission. Furthermore, James tells us that only the person who can bridle the tongue is able to bridle the whole body. What is he telling us? He is telling us controlling the tongue is key to controlling the body. You may bridle your hands and your feet and your eyes and your ears without great effort. But no man will bridle the tongue

without great difficulty.

(3:3-4)

How much does a horse weigh? I suppose a large horse may weigh 1500 pounds. How much does a bit and bridle weigh? I suppose less than 5 pounds. It is possible, and we have all seen it done, to put that 5 pound object on that 1500 pound horse and control that horse. This is amazing! Tug on the 5 pound bridle on the left side, and the 1500 pound horse turns left. Pull back simultaneously on both sides of the 5 pound bridle and the 1500 pound horse slows down or stops if you pull long enough. Again, this is amazing!

Have you ever seen the rudder on a ship? How much does a ship weigh? Ships are so heavy they are measured in tons and not pounds. The rudder, however, is so small it weighs only several pounds. Yet, the rudder weighing a few pounds can guide the ship weighing many tons! Again, this is amazing!

How much does a tongue weigh? Would anyone like to volunteer to cut their tongue out of their mouth and let us weigh it? I am quite sure the tongue only weighs a few ounces. How much does a body weigh? One hundred or 200 pounds? If the rudder weighing a few pounds can guide the ship of many tons, surely the human tongue can guide the body! Not so! If the 5 pound bridle can guide and control the 1500 pound horse, surely the tongue can guide the body! Not so! Verse two tells us that only a “perfect” man can bridle his body with his tongue.

I do not know or understand why God gave such a small object, that is, the tongue, such great power. It can be to a man or woman the most fabulous asset that they own. On the other hand, it can be the most disruptive force in your life. If properly used, the tongue is more valuable than your home or your bank account.

(3:5-6)

The tongue is a “lethal member.” The little toe on one’s foot is also a little member. Little members are important to the body. It is said by medical science that the little toe is very important to the balance of the body. If the little toe is removed, the body loses a great portion of its ability to remain balanced when standing or walking. I am glad I have a tongue. It is the way in which we communicate. It is also filled with taste buds that let us enjoy the flavor of food. Wow! Certainly, as this verse five tells us, the tongue “*boasteth great things.*”

Looking back through history, we see many great speeches that have changed the world. The speeches were made by the little tongue.

I will never forget these words spoken by President Reagan: “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall.” Those six words changed the course of history! Those six words were the impetus behind the collapse of communism. Thank God for the tongue of President Reagan. Surely, James said it correctly— *“the tongue boasteth great things.”*

However, the tongue can cause *great* damage. It can build a great building- and it can tear down a great building. It can put out a fire- and it can build a fire. It can love- and it can hate. It can heal- and it can hurt. It can warm- and it can freeze. It can unify- and it can divide. No member of the body is as amazing as the tongue!

“Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!” I do not believe history has verified how the great fire of Chicago (1871) began. There is one account that the fire started when, on the edge of town, a man got up very early to milk a cow. The barn was owned by Mrs. Patrick O’Leary. He had a small kerosene lantern. As he was milking, unbeknownst to him, the lantern turned over and set the hay in the stall afire. The fire spread uncontrollably and ruined a great portion of the great city of Chicago. *“Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!”*

Just as Pres. Reagan's spoke those famous six words that changed the course of the world, your tongue and my tongue have a great impact, not just in our home, but in the “world.” The tongue can reach out and save souls a thousand miles away. Through the preaching of the Gospel, primarily with the tongue, a portion of the world has been saved. However, that same tongue can start a worldwide war. The tongue can destroy a testimony in 30 seconds, a testimony that took a lifetime to build! Careful!

A few years ago a Delta jet crashed in Dallas, Texas. After the investigation, it was determined that the cause of the crash was the small flaps on the rear edge of the wings. The flaps were in the wrong position for takeoff. Thirteen souls lost their lives and many were injured. Those flaps weigh nothing compared to the weight of that jet aircraft.

The tongue *“defileth the whole body.”* You may act nice and Christian-like. With your hands, you may feed the poor. With your hands, you may clothe the naked. With your feet, you may deliver the Gospel. Yet, the tongue can tear down all that the hands and feet and legs and back have done.

Have you heard it said “it was hell on earth?” During the Vietnam War, those involved often classified the warfare as “hell on earth.” Let us be clear, the only hell on earth spoken of in God's word is the

fire found in the tongue. How dreadful, to think the greatest destructive forces on this planet reside in the mouth of each and every one of us! This is scary and should get the attention of every person who will take the time to study James chapter 3.

(3:7-8)

Proverbs 30:30 tells us “*a lion which is strongest among beasts.*” A lion is huge and powerful. Yet, all of us have seen the lion tamed. A lion can be taught to sit, to jump through a ring of fire, to stand on its hind feet. Birds can be tamed. Serpents can be tamed. Once I sat and watched a sea mammal weighing many tons obey the commands of its trainer, a small woman. Yet, “*the tongue can no man tame.*” Let this statement be absorbed into your mind. It is “*full of deadly poison.*” My hand has no poison in it. If it did I would go to the doctor for help. My foot has no poison in it. I submit to you that if my hand had the poison in it that my tongue has in it, my hand would rot and fall off of my arm! If my hand had the poison of my tongue, I could reach out and touch you and you would get sick! You could not walk if your feet and legs had the poison in them that is in your tongue. Your stomach would be full of ulcers if it had the poison in it that is in your tongue. The tongue contains “*deadly poison.*”

(3:9–12)

Can a fig tree bear olives? Can the grapevine bare figs? The answer is no. Can a fountain contain both sweet water and bitter water? The answer is no. Yet, the tongue has sweet water and bitter water at the same time. Verse nine says at one moment it is blessing God. The next moment the same tongue is cursing the neighbor. Oh no! Verse 10 “*out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing.*” When we stopped to think of it, the tongue is quite amazing! It is the most “talented” member of the body, yet the smallest.

I want to share with you my favorite verses from the Bible in regard to the tongue:

Pr 10:20 “The tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth.”

Pr 10:31 “The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom: but the froward tongue shall be cut out.”

Pr 12:18 “There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health.”

Pr 12:19 “The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment.”

Pr 15:4 “A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit.”

Pr 17:20 “He that hath a froward heart findeth no good: and he that

hath a perverse tongue falleth into mischief.”

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

Pr 21:23 “Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.”

Pr 25:15 “By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone.” (Here, the Bible teaches us “sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me” is a big lie.)

Pr 25:23 “The north wind driveth away rain: so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue.”

Ps 120:2 “Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue.”

Ps 141:3 “Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.”

Ps 19:14 “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.”

(3:13)

“*Who is a wise man?*” I'd like to know the answer to this question, wouldn't you? I love the plainness of the book of James. In chapter 1 verse 26 the question “who is religious?” is asked. The answer to that question is not what we thought James would say. So, are you ready now to see how James will answer the question “who is wise?”

Often, society thinks a wise man is one who can speak well. To some, a wise man is someone who has made a lot of money. He has done well financially. A wise man, we think, is someone who has read a lot of books. We think of a lawyer as wise. A doctor is supposed to know everything! However, we are confused about what wisdom is. Be careful, as we often do, not confuse wisdom with knowledge. What does James say wisdom is? A wise man, according to James, is *someone who goes about doing good deeds in meekness.*

Wisdom, then, must come from God. It is God-given, for human nature of man is certainly not meekness. We find knowledge in books of learning, but wisdom is not found in books. Being wise is a Godly attribute. So, who is wise among you? The answer is the man that shows forth a good conversation with good works and meekness. Conversation does not mean “words.” Conversation means your behavior, that is, the life you exhibit before fellow man. A wise man is one whose lifestyle reflects good works. A wise man does not boast of his works. A wise man puts others first. He does not say “watch me do this good deed” for he does not delight in being seen of men. He simply goes forth doing good works and never calls attention to himself. Please note the word “meekness” and note its importance.

(3:14-16)

I do not want my life to be marked by “bitter envying and strife.” Such is the mark of an unwise man. “Bitter envying and strife” are works of the flesh and not of God. God's Spirit does not yield such fruit. Please do not forget that James is speaking to saved people! Do you mean saved people can show forth “bitter envying and strife?” They sure can or James would not have warned us in such a fashion. Verse 15 tells us this kind of wisdom is not from above, that is, God, but is earthly, sensual, and devilish. I can say “amen,” can you?

Verse 16 tells us the mark of envying and strive is “confusion and every evil work.” If a person's wisdom is not from God, it cannot be blessed. You may have fleshly wisdom and the applause of man, but confusion and evil work may follow. Verse 17 tells us the wisdom that is from above is “*first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to*

be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.” Notice these marks of heavenly wisdom: pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy, with good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. Thank you brother James for the plainness of your writings. A lot of folk would do good works and help others if they could be seen and recognized and applauded by men. Such works are hypocritical. Some men's works are directed to specific individuals and, therefore, show forth partiality.

Have you ever planted a crop? If so, did you receive any fruit? Verse 18 tells us *“the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.”* I cannot understand why some folk delight in a warring spirit. I have often referred to Isaac as one of my heroes in the Bible. Why- because Isaac was a peace-lover. When the Philistines stopped up his wells, he refused to fight them. He simply dug more wells in a new location and moved on. After three or four occasions of the Philistines afflicting him and Isaac refusing to fight them, the Philistines came to him and said “you're different. You are not like the other enemies we have had. You love peace.” Isaac should be hero to all peace-loving people.

We have all planted a crop at some time. We get fruit from our planting such as fruit and vegetables. How do we get righteousness in our life? We get it as the fruit of peace. Do you desire to be more righteous? Then, sow more peace along life's pathway. Those who sow in a warring spirit will gather the fruit of confusion.

Chapter 4

(4:1-3)

“From whence come wars and fightings among you?” Please remember James is writing to Christian people, not to sinners. He is writing to the brothers and sisters of the family of God. We established that when we began our study of this book in chapter 1. Is it possible for saved people, that is, the children of God to have conflict? The answer is yes! It is an unfortunate truth. It is nearly impossible for two people, such as man and wife, to live in the same house and not have disagreements. No two people are identical. It is certainly impossible for the family of God, made up of thousands, to not have disagreements. But, the disagreements need not lead to “wars and fightings!”

Why, then, do “wars and fightings” happen between the people of God? James gives us the answer in this verse one. The “wars and fightings” come from the lusts that dwell in the children of God. (At this time, please read James 1:14-15.) We learned from 1:14-15 that

lust is not wrong (sin) until it “conceives,” that is, until it has a baby. The human flesh is filled with lusts. Do not lie to yourself and say that you have no lusts. You are being untruthful or are deceived. When a disagreement arises between two of God’s children and becomes a war, it is because one or both parties have their selfish interest in mind. Note the words “*your lust.*” In other words, “I want my way!” “I am not going to change my mind.” “I am not going to apologize.” Such an attitude stems from internal lusts and greed in the heart of a child of God.

In your lifetime, how many people have come to you and said “I am sorry. I was wrong?” The answer may be “none.” We are told to kill the flesh daily. The apostle Paul said “*I die daily*” I Corinthians 15:31. He meant he had to daily kill the internal lusts that would cause him problems and difficulty in his Christian walk. It is dangerous for you or me to leave home and walk into this world in the midst of other people when our flesh is not under subjection to the Holy Ghost. Every one of us is a ticking time-bomb unless our flesh is crucified. Why? We are filled with lusts of the human nature.

I Corinthians 14:33 “*For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.*” Church conflicts and quarrels are not the work of Holy God. They are the lusts inside of saved people being manifested outwardly. When we involve ourselves in conflict, we are showing our fleshly side and not our spiritual side.

Verse 2 “*Ye lust and have not.*” What good has ever come from human lust? You have never been nor ever will be “blessed” by the lusts of your flesh. It may feel good for a moment. King David enjoyed a few minutes with Bathsheba, but he suffered a lifetime for those few moments. Lust of the flesh gives temporal satisfaction and is always followed by pain and emptiness. In the end, ye “*have not.*” Lust manifests itself in things that are *temporal*. Lust will never bring lasting satisfaction in the life of a saint! Don’t try it.

Verse 2 “*ye have not, because ye ask not.*” Asking God for things should not be foreign to God’s children. John R. Rice once said “if it is legal for you to have it, it is legal to ask God for it.” I wish I could develop a better practice of asking God for things. Why do I say this? Because God could screen what I have and make sure it is what is best for my life. At this time, I have an 8-month old grandson. Often, my wife and I will ask the baby’s mother “is it ok if CJ has this?” “Can CJ have this toy to play with or will it hurt him?” Do you see why, then, we should ask God for all things? He would then screen our requests and make sure nothing enters our life that is hurtful or displeasing to Him. Ask God for all things!

God does not always grant our request for “things,” according to verse 3. It is God’s choice as to what He lets us have. However, there are times when we ask for things that are okay to God, but we do not receive them. In such a case, we likely have asked amiss. Let us look closer at asking amiss.

Let us look at some examples of asking “amiss:”

- we ask for things and do not *believe* God is able to provide them. Why ask Him? Save your breath. Doubt has killed many requests sent to God with good intentions. If you do not believe God is able to provide what you have asked for, then do not ask Him for it.

- we ask for things to be provided according to our schedule. God does not grant our request. Later, we realize it was not the *right time* in our life for Him to give us that which we requested. Example: Hannah wanted a baby badly. She had to go to Shiloh and pray for many years before God granted her request, for God knew when the time was right in her life for her baby son Samuel to be born (see I Samuel 1).

- we ask for things that are not God’s will for our life. This is mentioned in verse 3 which reads “*that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*” We want something to satisfy our own lust. Shame on us! He has no choice but to refuse our request. Don’t fault God when He does not respond. He will grant it if it is His will for you. If not, He will not grant it. Example: to ask God to heal your sickness so that you may go fishing is asking God amiss.

- do not ask God for answers that are already given in God’s Word. As an example, it is foolish to ask God if you should attend church. You don’t need to pray for His will in this regard. Example: The Bible clearly says in Hebrews 10:25 “*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*”

(4:4)

This is an interesting verse. Our first thoughts are “who has been running around with another person that is not their spouse?” Will the guilty party step forth! Most often we think of adultery in terms of infidelity of the flesh in a sensual fashion. This is not the case in this verse of scripture. This verse speaks of “spiritual adultery.” Have you ever heard this term?

God saved me and made me a new creature when He saved me. He separated me from the world. It is His intention that, from the day I was saved and going forward, I give my affection to Him and not to those things I knew as a sinner. What if I don’t? What if I lust once

again for those things God saved me from? If I do, I commit *spiritual adultery*, not adultery with another person, but *spiritual adultery*! This is the adultery spoken of in verse 4.

God is a jealous God. II Corinthians 11:2 “*For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.*” Men, would you like to share your wife with another man? Women, would you like to share your husband with another woman? **NO!** Yet, if you are saved, you are the bride of Christ, the Son of God. Do you think God wants to share you with the gods you enjoyed when you were a sinner? **NO!**

I wish to pause now and remind us all James is writing to saints. Don't tell me saved people cannot “mess up” and do God wrong after they are saved. Some folk see a saint “mess up,” and they conclude such a person was *never* saved. It is entirely possible for God's people to turn to a former god, and by doing so, sin against the God who saved them by committing spiritual adultery! Be not deceived, God will deal with the saint who commits spiritual adultery.

Verse 5 asks a good question: is it a waste of words, ink, and space in Genesis 8:21 where the scripture reads “...for the imagination of man's heart *is* evil from his youth...”? When a sinner gets saved, the sinner does not get a new body or human spirit at that moment. Later, that will come. So, after salvation the “old man,” who never died, causes the spiritual man problems. The old spirit, that is, the spirit of the flesh, rises up against the new Spirit of God that came inside at salvation.

We will continue in the next lesson with a discussion of overcoming spiritual adultery.

Our last lesson, lesson 7, closed with a discussion of a serious problem among the people of God- the problem of *spiritual adultery*. Verse four speaks of *adulterers* and *adulteresses*. Verse 4 warns us that after we are saved, if we have friendship with the world we are enemies with God. Whoever is a friend of the world is not a friend of God. You can't be both!

Verse five tells us there is warfare in every person that is saved. Are you saved? If there is not warfare in you, you are not saved. We are advised that the spirit that dwells in us, that is, the human spirit, is *against* God. Your human spirit did not get saved when you got saved. Your soul was saved. You still have the flesh and the human spirit that occupies the flesh. Therefore, Brother James' warning is that we no longer follow the desires of the old man, but cling to the desires of the new man. How is this possible? The answer to this question we will learn in verse 8.

(4:6)

Thank God for the "grace of God." By the grace of God, a saved person can have victory over the flesh, that is, the desires of man. However, if we have that dangerous thing inside us called pride, grace cannot work in us. Pride is a killer! Pride in the heart of a person prevents God's grace from working in the believer. Pride leads to spiritual death. The key to having victory over self is for the believer to have *humility*. God cannot help a proud man! If you believe you are "king of the world" and filled with such pride, God can't help you. Proud people don't get God's goodies. Only until we humble ourselves can grace give us the victory we need over self. As long as pride rules, self rules. God is standing ready and is more than happy to help a humble man, but cannot help a proud man.

Let us take a preview of verse 10: "*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.*" Please understand from this verse that pride elevates the flesh and prevents God's grace from lifting up the believer. Which elevator do you want to ride? Do you want *God* to rule your life, or do *you* wish to be in charge of your life? Pride says "you don't need God. You are intelligent and strong." Every believer must decide between pride and humility. It is you *or* God- both can't be in charge!

Why do men and women commit such horrible acts that are so brazen and bold and some even stupid? The answer lies in that ugly monster called *pride*. Recently, a prominent public figure had a baby

with his housekeeper and his wife at about the same time! Did he think his wife living in the same house with him would not catch him? But no, because of *pride* in him, he felt invincible and thought it impossible to be caught in his sin! I do not believe proud King David believed God would catch him in his sin with Bathsheba. Proud King David for sure never thought a little preacher man by the name of Nathan would come to him, stick his finger in his face and tell him of his sin.

A man prominent in the sporting world was at one time humble. He had a modest salary and coached at a relatively unknown university. He had some success. His success rewarded him. He got a job at a big university. His salary increased fourfold. His team got on TV regularly. Pride derailed him. The same man who at one time stood strong for family values left his wife for another woman. Pride wrecked his career. Pride makes a person do irrational things. They become bigger than God! They adopt the attitude that “nobody can catch me in my sin. No one can tear me down.” He developed the notion that “I can get by with what ever I wish.” Be not deceived, pride is a killer. It will kill you spiritually. Pride will kill your home. Pride will kill your testimony. Pride will kill your service for Christ. No wonder pride is on the list of seven things that God hates in the book of Proverbs. God hates pride. Proverbs 16:18 *“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.”*

Be not deceived, God has never, nor ever will, make even one saved person walk with Him. God is a perfect gentleman and will not force His will in anyone's life. You make the decision whether or not you want to be “spirit-filled and walk with God” or just be saved and exist on life-support. You make the decision as to whether or not you want to win the battle of the flesh. Do you want victory over *self* or do you want *self* to win? If the answer is that you want victory in your life and you want to have God real in your life, you must adopt *humility*. If every Christian person would survey their life, they would realize there have been days they dangerously walked in pride. And only by the grace of God during those days of pride did they did not stumble and fall to their spiritual death.

So, are we going to commit spiritual adultery? Or, can we have victory over the world and be God's friend? This wonderful verse six assures us if we give *humility* its rightful place in our heart and life, we can avoid spiritual adultery.

(4:7-8)

There is yet another great admonition in verse 7 on how to avoid spiritual adultery- *“Submit yourselves therefore to God.”* What does

the word *submit* mean? Have you ever noticed a “yield” sign in your driving on the highways? When your lane is marked yield, the other driver in the other lane has the right-of-way. The other driver goes first. After the other driver fulfills his wish, you are allowed to go onward. The attitude of the average saved person is “God, I will go first and you follow me.” Not many people today want to *submit* themselves to God for that would mean God is first and they are second.

When we submit to God, we are where He wants us to be on Sunday morning rather than where we want to be. When we submit ourselves to God, 10% of our income is in the storehouse of God and not spent as we wish to spend it. When we submit to God, we read what God wants us to read and not what we want to read. We wear what He wants us to wear and not what we desire to wear. Again, as we said in regard to verse six, *you make the decision on how close you want to be to God*. Your relationship with God is not by force. Not many believers alive today are willing to let God be the boss of their life. The Apostle Paul submitted to God. He was able to make the statement “to live is Christ.” He stood with Christ, walked with Christ, ate with Christ, slept with Christ, and daily did what Christ would have him do. A person who *submits* to God can avoid spiritual adultery. That is our topic- how do we avoid spiritual adultery? Do you want Him as boss or do you not want Him?

“*Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*” Ephesians 5:11 “*and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to prove them.*” You may say “I don't understand unfruitful works of darkness, so how can I avoid them?” I must ask you then, have you ever been saved? Ephesians 5:8 assures us we know the difference between right and wrong after we are saved- “*for ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.*” Are you able to tell when you are in a dark room, and then you step out into a room that's well lit? You may say “that's a stupid question.” My point is you know right from wrong after God saves you. Maybe a newborn babe in Christ needs a good while to understand the following of the Holy Spirit. I well understand that. The morning I got saved, I did not realize that God was going to go home with me and sleep with me and live with me 24 hours a day. I never understood that the day I got saved! But it did not take long until I came to the understanding that God dwells in a believer through the Holy Ghost. That little voice in me that told me not to say a “bad” word was God in me! That little voice inside me that told me not to be unkind to the neighborhood kids was God in me! If you have been saved 30 days or more, you know God lives in you. You therefore

know right from wrong.

With the knowledge God gives us we are to “*resist the devil.*” If you know the devil is in a building, don’t peek in the window. If you know the devil is driving in the left lane, get in the right lane. If you believe the devil is down at the pool hall, don’t go there. If you believe the devil is in a bottle of whiskey, don’t put the bottle to your lips. If you know, and you *do* if you are saved, that it is the Devil promoting that evil, selfish attitude in you, run away from it. When the devil says “stay in the bed Sunday morning. You don’t need to go to church,” tell him “no, I’m going to church.” We have saved people who are so weak if the devil told them to jump into hell, there they would go- headfirst!

Would you take a clean white shirt neatly pressed and put on a dirty, smelly jacket over it? You may say “that sounds foolish.” Well, that is the way we do God. Your soul is pure and sinless. God saved you from your sin and washed your soul in His blood making it as white as snow. Yet, after salvation we put on dirty clothes. Thus we have the command “*cleanse your hands, you sinners.*” But you may say “wait a minute. I thought the book of James was to believers.” You are correct. Yet, the sad truth is believers do sin. Thus, we learn from verse 8 our hands can get dirty even though we are saved. When saved people have dirty hands, they are called sinners. We are then told to cleanse our hands of this world. This world gets us dirty. This world is filled with the dirt of sin.

We are further instructed in verse 8 to “*purify your hearts, ye double minded.*” If I called you a double-minded person, you would be upset at me. However, if inside you there is a pure, cleansed sinless soul and you have dirt in your heart, you are double-minded. And what did James say about a double-minded believer in verse eight of chapter 1? He told us “*A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.*”

(4:9-10)

At one point in his ministry, the Apostle Paul was accused of starting riots among the people. Would you start a riot, an uprising of the people? I know your answer is “no.” However, if you are living a double life by being double-minded, that is, you have on a clean shirt and a dirty jacket, you have the ability to start a riot! Here’s how- make up your mind to serve God and forsake the world. Your flesh will rebel! A riot will follow! Your flesh will kick and scream. You will have never witnessed such a temper tantrum in your life as that which occurs when you set your foot down, make up your mind, and decide to quit being double-minded and quit committing spiritual

adultery. Have you ever seen a child get down in the floor and kick and scream and pitch a fit? That is what is going to happen to you when you decide to follow Jesus with your whole heart.

(4:11-12)

Notice the wording of this verse: *“speak not evil one of another, brethren.”* Every word in this phrase catches my attention. Look at the first word “speak.” You would not dare hit a man with your fist, but there is no limit to what your tongue would say about him.

Now, I noticed next the word “evil.” My father taught me to believe there was at least one element of good in every man. It is so hard to overlook the nine bad things in one’s life and dwell on the one good thing. Why do we dwell on the bad? Because the “tongue is a fire...set on fire of hell” James 3:6.

Next, I notice the words *“one of another, brethren.”* Let the devil talk about the devil. Let the devil’s crowd beat and condemn one another. The duty of Christians is not to tear down one another but to lift up one another. Truly, everyone makes mistakes and has shortcomings. Follow me one day and you will find my faults. What is the point? The point is there is and, always will be, something negative to say about a Christian brother. James is trying to instruct us to see the good in one another and leave the bad in the hands of God.

Welcome to lesson 9. We have more than one topic in this lesson, but we begin with the topic of *life*. It is an interesting topic to the living. We will see in this lesson the uncertainty of life, the shortness of life, and the vanity of life.

(4:13-15)

The first thing we note about life in verse 13 is life's uncertainty. Most of life seems to be spent planning. How much time did you spend yesterday planning for today? How many things that you planned yesterday for today have happened or will happen? We plan for tomorrow, and we plan for next week and next year. We even plan for retirement. The thing we should plan for is death, but we don't like to plan for such an event.

Verse 13 speaks of a man who makes a plan for the coming year. How does he know he will live another year? The man in verse 13 had a plan to move to another city and become a trader. He plans to stay there for a year. Money seems to be his motive, although we do not know for certain. Most planning that we do centers around money, in case you haven't noticed. The man proclaimed that today or tomorrow I am going to another city and be a trader. But the scripture says "now." In other words, don't go later today or tomorrow, but *now*. God is not interested in what you plan to do for Him tomorrow or even later today. He is interested in *now*.

How many days are there in a year? The answer is "one." There is one "day" in a year and 364 "tomorrows." Likely, that is why we do not worry about one today. We have 364 tomorrows to worry about. We give little attention to *today*. *Today* is a gift from God. Why then, do we treat a gift from God in such a manner? The Bible teaches us that every day is a gift from God for Psalm 118:24 reads "*This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.*" We have *today* and no promise of *tomorrow*, so why do we wrap ourselves up in things uncertain? We get greatly concerned with retirement, and it may never come. This man of verse 13 was typical of most people in life. He lost focus of *today*. I am not promised *tomorrow* nor is any man. I do have *today*. Why not try to do something about *today*, or even better, *NOW*?

The man of verse 13 is instructed to "*go to now.*" I often say "God will never give you an assignment *today* that he wants you to do *tomorrow.*" Looking back on life, I seemed to have spent half of my life looking into the future concerning what God may have me do for Him. One day I determined, by the instruction of God, such a view is

not scriptural. You may not have an assignment from God today. If you don't, it is because you have not listened to God. Where in the Bible are we told our assignment for today is to "be real quiet and listen for God to tell you what He wants you to do tomorrow?" Give me the chapter and verse. The instruction is "go to now." Do it now!

Do you like to borrow money? I hate to borrow money. Yet, a person who says "tomorrow I am going to do thus for the Lord" is borrowing time.

Verse 14 assures us "*ye know not what shall be on the morrow.*" This fact applies to every president, king, and every walk of life including the rich and the poor, the bond and the free. God gave every person two things in common. It is not their height or knowledge or skin color. He gave every man 24 hours of time in a day, and the second thing is uncertainty to deal with tomorrow. The President has plans for tomorrow, but tomorrow may not come. If tomorrow does come, the plan may be interrupted. Monday does not listen to what Sunday has to say. Tuesday does not report to Monday, for it is its own boss.

Remember the rich man of Luke chapter 12? He had an abundance of crop. He put together a plan for tomorrow. The plan consisted of tearing down small barns and replacing them with large barns so that he could store the crop. His plan even included retirement for he said in Luke 12:19 "*I will say to my soul, soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years!*" God got his attention in verse 20 when he asked him this question "*thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?*"

Dear sinner, a high percentage of the inhabitants of hell intended to get saved *tomorrow*. *Tomorrow* never came. A high percentage of saved people intend to get busy for God *tomorrow*. *Tomorrow* never comes.

How short is life? Let us look at God's word. Verse 14 describes life a vapor. A vapor can be likened unto a small cloud. We see it in the sky one moment, and the next moment it has vanished away. At 16 years old it seems life is an eternity waiting to happen. I stand before you today with one thing certain that I can testify to- life has been a vapor.

Other writers in the Word of God agree with James concerning the shortness of life. Job described life in Job chapter 14:1 as "*of few days.*" The Psalmist described the shortness of life as a hand breath. One writer described the swiftness of life as faster than a weaver's shuttle. I tell folk at funerals "today we bury our fathers-tomorrow

our sons bury us.” I believe James warning concerning the uncertainty and shortness of life is intended to get our attention for the purpose of getting busy for the Lord- NOW. Again, I repeat- God will not give you an assignment today that you are to start tomorrow.

Due to the uncertainty of life, it is wise for us to take heed to verse 15. When we talk about our plans we ought to say “if the Lord will.” There is a good illustration I will share with you as follows:

A Christian man had a neighbor who was not a Christian. The unsaved man was always boasting of tomorrow. The Christian neighbor was trying to teach the unsaved man to say “if the Lord will” when he was describing his plans. One day the unsaved neighbor came down the road leading his mule. The Christian neighbor said to the man “where are you going?” The unsaved neighbor replied “I am going to the livestock sale to sell my mule.” The Christian neighbor said “how do you know you're going to the sale?” The unsaved neighbor replied “that sale has been conducted for many years at the same place on the same day and that's where I'm going.” At that moment a streak of lightning killed the mule. The mule fell dead. The unsaved neighbor removed the mule's halter and started walking. The Christian man said to him “now, where are you go?” The unsaved man replied “I'm going home, Lord willing.”

This is lesson nine of our study of James. Lord willing, we will study together again when we have lesson 10. Lord willing, I will see you in church tonight at our Sunday night meeting. Lord willing, I will eat lunch in a few minutes after this service has ended. Lord willing, I will take my next breath. Lord willing, I will go to bed and sleep tonight. No man knows what a day will bring forth.

What is the message of brother James to you and me in these three verses? The message is twofold: one, life is uncertain and secondly, life is short. I'd like to borrow one additional fact of life from Job 14:1- “life is filled with trouble.” Many things we will never comprehend in the Bible. A wise man should take heed to these 3 things concerning life.

(4:16-17)

Have you ever boasted in your accomplishments? Truth is, we all have at some time in life. Boasting is human nature and most of human nature is sinful. The flesh is enmity against God. Boasting displeases God, for we are instructed in verse 16 “all such rejoicing is evil.” The Apostle Paul gave us the admonition “*God forbid that I should glory save in the cross.*” All that I am, or ever will be, I owe to the goodness of God. Verse 16 could be called “the vanity of life.” We have learned thus far, concerning life, it is short and uncertain.

From Job we learn life is troubled. Verse 16 adds that life is filled with boasting. The first sin in the universe was the sin of boasting. Prior to the fate of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Satan rose up in Isaiah 14 and boasted of what he would do against God. So, I believe it is correct to say boasting is the oldest sin on record.

II Corinthians 11:17 *“That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting.”* Great instruction we have from the Apostle Paul as he spoke to the Corinthian people. Whenever I speak of myself I am not speaking in regard to my Lord. Thus, also speaking in regard to self can be classified as boasting.

Don't miss the little word “now” in verse 16. We just determined in verses 13-15 that we need to get busy for the Lord NOW. So, when we boast, we are using time that should be spent for the Lord. We are stealing God's time.

Verse 17 contains one of the most prolific statements in all of God's Word. We note the first word of the verse, “therefore.” In other words, after the good advice you have just had in the previous verses, *“to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”* One may say, “I just don't know what God wants in my life.” Don't say that- you make all God's children look bad. The first thing God wants is obedience to the instruction He has given His children. Have you heard of the 10 commandments? Have you heard of a book called the Bible?

I believe if we could sum up in two statements what God wants in the life of His children it would be:

- *Obey His instruction as a Father to a child*
My father and mother instructed me as their child. God has the right to instruct His children.
- *Serve Him as Lord (master)*
He gave His Son on the Cross of Calvary to save my life. I am not my own but am bought with a price.

Do not forget the book of James is written to the children of God, that is, saved people. Are you seeking in your life for those things that verse 17 calls “good?” Spend more time in the study of God's Word and in prayer. God did not save you to wander in the dark. He wants you to know what His desire is for you. Find that desire in His Word and in prayer.

Verse 17 stresses the sin we call “the sin of omission.” It haunts us all. I did not murder this week. I did not steal from my neighbors this week. However, I did not do all that my master wanted me to do. I

therefore must pray each night “God forgive me for the things I failed to do along with those things I did that were not pleasing to you.”

(5:1-6)

These first six verses of this lesson are some of the most comprehensive verses in the Bible dealing with the topic of riches. I suppose every person at one time or another has desired to be rich. Likely, we all have at one time dreamed of riches. There is no sin in riches. We want to make this perfectly clear. Rich people can be saved just as can poor people. God loves rich people just as he does poor people. The Bible instructs us in I Timothy 6:10 that “the love of money is the root of all evil.” Do not miss what this often misquoted verse is saying. It is not money that is the root of all evil, it is the “love of money.” So, before we discuss the six verses, let it be established that money is not sinful.

The second important point to establish and understand is that riches *do* hinder folk from coming to Christ. This is established in the words of Christ where He said in Mk 10:25 “*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.*” Riches give people a false sense of security. If rich people would speak from their hearts, many would say “I don't need God. I have riches.” Thus, riches do hinder folk from accepting Christ as their Savior. We have an example of this difficulty in the book of Luke 18:18-27. A rich ruler came to Christ and desired to have Christ come into his heart. After Christ commanded him to sell his possessions, give it to the poor, and follow Jesus, he went away sorrowful. This young, rich ruler of Luke 18 is a testimony of how riches hinder folk from coming to Christ.

Christ will accept rich people, but they must come Christ's way. Job was rich and loved God. Solomon was rich and loved God. Joseph of Armimathea was rich and loved God, for it was he who begged the body of Christ from pilot. Considering Nicodemus' stature in the political circle of his time, it is likely he was rich.

So we have established three important facts as an introduction to our study of James 5:1-6:

- riches are not sinful but the love of riches is sinful
- riches do, according to the Bible, make it difficult for folk accept Christ
- rich people can be saved and love God very much

Now, let us examine the first six verses of James chapter 5. In a previous lesson we found in James 1:10-11 that riches are temporal. As grass that cometh forth and then withered, riches do likewise. Riches don't last. I have never seen a trailer behind a funeral hearse.

Regardless of how rich you are, you have nothing at the time of death. James instructs the rich man, in verse 1, to go ahead and “weep and howl for your miseries” NOW for you ARE going to lose them.

Rich men’s garments become moth-eaten and their money cankers. Why do garments become moth-eaten? Why do coins of gold and silver become cankered and covered with rust? It is because they are out of circulation. Store a garment in a closet for a long time, and it may become damaged by moths. However, if the garment is taken out periodically and worn, it is likely safe from moths.

Why does money canker and rust? This happens because the money is not in circulation. The rich man stores his goods. While in storage, moths bite holes in the garments and rust attacks the coins. What is the problem? *The real problem is the rich man has too much!* He has clothes he does not wear and money he does not spend. God never put one person on planet Earth to be a bank. You are not a mini-warehouse where clothes are stored. If you have stored money that you don’t use and stored clothes that you don’t wear, you have too much money and too many clothes. The sad part is someone else is doing without.

We must look at the example of the rich man in Luke 12. God blessed his crops. God let good rain and good sunshine fall on the crops to bring forth a bountiful harvest. Did the rich man plan to share the excess food of his harvest? No. His desire was to store it for his retirement. I heard of a common man recently who has so much money stored that if he were to spend an awesome sum each month the rest of his life, he would never touch the principle of the money. He has too much. He will leave his estate to children who do not honor God, God’s house, God’s Word, or His Great Commandment of spreading the Gospel to the world.

When manna fell in the wilderness, an amount appropriate for each person came down. Each person was allotted one omer each day. After the morning gathering, some said to the Israeli elders “we did not get any manna.” When an investigation was performed it was found that some took two omers, theirs and someone else’s. They were greedy and guilty of hoarding. Do you have a missionary’s rent in your checking account? Do you have a poor man’s Bible in your bank? Do you have a cold man’s coat in your closet? Again, I repeat, God never put one person on the earth to be a bank or a warehouse.

Verse four reveals the way in which many rich people get their money- by fraud. This is evil and sad. Fraud is deception and thievery. Do you have any money you stole from someone? If so, I pity you and not the person you stole from. God will take care of

them and will one day rip you apart. In verse 4 the rich man cheated the laborers concerning their wages. How disgusting! They worked in the field, they sweated, their backs were sore, and their mouths were parched from thirst. They gathered the rich man's crop into the barns. When finished, they put their hand out for their pay and the rich man kept back part. Do you know what I personally think of this? There will not be a place in hell hot enough for a man who cheats someone concerning wages.

The cry of the man cheated out of his labor went into the ears of "the Lord of Sabaoth." Sabaoth refers to "armies or a great mass of people or angels." In the Old Testament, the term commonly used is "the Lord of Hosts." When the rich man stole the workers wages and they cried, an army heard them! Wow! I'd sure hate to have an army after me. I am not going to steal anyone's wages. Don't you do it either.

Verses five and six give the common errors of the rich. Error number one is found in verse five: "*ye have lived in pleasure on the earth.*" The rich love pleasure. They love the lights of the big city and the fun they can buy there. They love gambling. They enjoy expensive food and extravagant things of life. The second error is, as verse five says, "*you have nourished your hearts.*" This phrase indicates the pride that dwells in the rich man. The third error in verse six- "*ye have condemned and killed the just.*" This indicates that the rich desire power. He desires to be in control of others. So, we have the three errors of the rich: unbridled desire for pleasure, pride, and power. These 3 things can strike a poor man as well, but the Bible warns they are frequently found in the life of the wealthy.

(5:7-11)

These five verses are written in regard to the topic of **patience**. Remember that James is writing to the 12 tribes who were scattered abroad. In other words, he is writing to Christians who have left their homes due to persecution. They fled their homeland to find the place where the affliction would be more tolerable. They are still persecuted and suffering. So, their *patience* is being tried. Has your *patience* ever been tried? When things are going well, we usually are patient. But when trouble comes we become impatient. Impatience never serves us well. It leads to rash decisions. Impatience leads to hostility. It leads to disagreements among the brethren. So, every student in this class, I'm sure, is interested in what James has to say about *patience*.

In verse seven James admonishes the brethren to be *patient* unto "*the coming of the Lord.*" He likens the need for *patience* to the

husbandman's crop. Two rains come. One is called early and one is the latter rain. The husbandman puts the seed in the ground. The rain comes. The plants come forth. Then, there comes a long period of no rain. It seems there is no hope for the crop. Finally, after some months, the latter rains begin to fall and the plants begin to yield fruit. The husbandman must be a patient man. In Africa, the husbandmen are impatient. They pull the carrots when there are only two or three inches in length and rush them to the market. They harvest the tomatoes when they are still small and rush them to the market. They have not learned to be patient until the fruit matures.

Two-thousand years ago, God sent the first rain. It was the early rain. God sent the savior Jesus Christ to die on the cross. Now, we are in the midst of a trying time as we wait for the latter rain. Soon, the trumpet of God will sound and the latter rain will fall! God will harvest his children to glory! Therefore, child of God, be *patient* in the work of the Lord and in your daily walk. Verse eight tells us "*for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*"

Verse nine assures us impatience can cause strife. Brother James tells us "*grudge not one against another, brethren.*" That is, *grieve not* one another. Let there be no anger or animosity one toward another. I know we are getting impatient. I know our real desire is to go to glory. I know we want to see our Savior above all things. But, rest assured, the time is near. God has not forgotten his children. Be patient! It will soon be over. "*The judge standeth before the door.*" Praise God! Behind that door stands Jesus. He is that near to calling his people home. Rest assured, he is hearing the conversation on the other side of the door. Don't quarrel and grumble and complain and have contention and friction among the brethren. The judge is listening!

The prophets are given as examples of *patience* in verse 10. Many of them suffered affliction and yet, exercised *patience*. Praise God for the prophets! There are too many to mention. Obadiah hid 100 people in caves safe from Ahab and Jezebel. He fed them water and bread in their hiding. Prophet Elijah got weary and wanted to die because of his affliction by Jezebel, but he kept serving God. Elisha was a man of God who was openly mocked. He never quit nor became impatient. He kept serving God. Daniel, if he was impatient in the lions den, he sure never showed it! The prophet Hosea lost his wife to sin and kept on preaching to Israel for years and years the message of God's impending judgment. Let these prophets, blessed men of God, be our examples. From them we learn what real *patience* is.

How about the champion of *patience*, brother Job? He is spoken of

in verse 11. The affliction suffered by Job is unimaginable. Job lost it all in the beginning. However, in the end he had double what he had in the beginning. I know we think of Job as grumbling during his great trial of sickness. If we only had the Old Testament we would call Job a grumbling person. Yet, we have the New Testament which labels him a man of *patience*, even to the extent we are pattern our life after his.

Be patient, child of God, we are serving a pitiful God, that is, one who exercises pity on his children. He is also described here as one who exercises tenderness. In the end, we will wish that we had not grumbled. After our first glimpse of jasper walls, the gates of pearl, the streets of gold, and our Savior, we will realize the inconveniences of this life where nothing. Be patient!

This lesson, lesson 11, takes us to our final lesson of the great book of James. I appreciate God giving brother James these precious words to write to us. James is one of those books that is called “the ABCs” of God's Word and Christian living. James did not “beat around the bush” in his writing, as the ol’ saying goes. He spoke in a simple and straight-forward manner. This is what we need in this age in which we live. If you are unable to understand the words of the book of James, you will have difficulty with the rest of the Bible.

(5:12)

For the third time in the book of James, we refer back to the tongue. Tongue in the Bible is one of two things: it is the object of flesh in your mouth, or, it is a spoken language. Here, James addresses the topic of “saying what you mean and meaning what you say.” Have you ever said “I didn't really mean what I said. What I meant to say was this.” We have all said this at some time in our life. It is certainly human to misspeak. That is why we all should ponder before we speak.

I want you to notice how verse 12 begins- “*But above all things.*” But hold on a minute. We just talked about being *patient* in verses 7 to 11. Patience is important, but now James is saying I need to speak to you about something more important than *patience*. We saw the importance of riches and how corruption comes from riches in verse one through six of this chapter. Money is important, but now James is saying to us that we should regard the matter in verse 12 above money.

What is this matter that is so important that it could be referred to as “*above all things?*” Well, this important matter is “how we speak.” It is the spoken language our tongue utters. “*Swear not*” is the instruction of James. What does it mean to *swear* in verse 12? I remember that as children, we were told not to *swear*. To *swear* meant to say words that were “ugly” and “inappropriate.” To take God's name in vain was forbidden in my upbringing and is still forbidden. Using God's name in vain is a form of swearing. To curse someone is to *swear* at them.

However, the meaning of the word “swear” in this verse 12 refers to the taking of an oath. Everyone is familiar with an oath. An oath is swearing to uphold whatever responsibilities are contained in the oath. Presidents and Congressmen and other public officials must take “an oath of office” when they assume the office. Usually, the person taking the oath places his hand on a Bible. The person is pledging to do what is commanded in the contents of the oath. The

oath is administered by an official of the organization in the presence of witnesses. This ceremony is referred to as “being sworn in.”

James instructs us not to “swear in.” Yet, we know it is common practice to do so in this era. It is a shame that swearing has to take place. The reason for administering an oath is to legally bind the person to truthfulness, fairness and honesty. It does not always work! Have you ever heard the saying “a man's word is his bond?” There was a time in history when that was true. No one had to sign a piece of paper to get a loan at the bank. One simply pledged with his mouth to repay the banker. In times gone by, no one assuming an office had to be “sworn in.” The person simply pledged to their constituents that they would execute the duties of the office with all diligence. But man has degraded in his honesty to the point that he must now be bound by a written oath. A person must sign papers pledging to repay a loan. Contracts are very important in our day.

Do you recall how we once discussed the business dealings of Abraham when he bought the burial site for Sarah? There were no papers involved. The entire transaction was done in the presence of witnesses. Unfortunately, in the day in which we live, truthful witnesses are hard to find. In the time of Christ, witnesses were paid to lie against the Lord. In the absence of honesty and integrity, we have reverted to a legal system that is so large this planet can hardly contain it, and we have done so because many people cannot be trusted to tell the truth. I certainly advise everyone to “get it in writing.” Put your business dealings on paper. This is sad, but is a sign of our time.

How do we avoid *swearing* and *oaths*? If people would let their “yes be yes” and their “no be no,” oaths and swearing would not be necessary. Contracts would be verbal, not written. If a man borrows \$100 from you and says he will repay you, he will if his “yes is yes” and his is “no is no.” Last week a congressman from New York accused of lewdness went on television before the world and said “I did not do this. Someone hacked into my facebook account.” Well, four days later he appeared on TV and said “I was lying.” In other words “forget what I said a couple days ago. I was lying. So what. Lying is OK.” This was his attitude. In a recent survey, 75% surveyed said it was OK to lie occasionally if it was to your advantage to do so. God help us!

(5:13-15)

Much has been said in religious circles in regard to sickness. “Sickness and healing” is a big topic worldwide. All the places I have been in this world are interested in “sickness and healing.” While we

sleep tonight, folk all around the world will be working on new medicines and new cures for sickness. The whole world should be interested in James 5:13-15. Nowhere in God's Word do we find a greater group of scriptures regarding sickness and healing than we find in these verses.

Verse 13 speaks first of all concerning those that are "*afflicted.*" Afflicted means "experiencing hardship." *Hardship* can be in various forms. Hardship may be financial, relationships, health or other types. I have had many kinds of *afflictions* in my lifetime and you have as well. So the instruction from this verse is if there is anyone afflicted, "*let him pray.*" Don't call for the elders and don't call for the church, but "*let him pray.*" There is much difference in *affliction*, as spoken of in verse 13, and *sickness* as spoken of in verse 14. When you have an ingrown toenail, you are not sick. You are afflicted. You ought to pray for yourself in such a case. When we get to verse 14, we are to call for the elders when we are *sick*. I will not call the church to pray for me when I have a sprained arm. That is a hardship, and I am to pray for myself.

Secondly in verse 13, we have those that are "*merry.*" Have you ever been "*merry?*" Sure you have. To be *merry* means to be joyous. So, we started with the *afflicted* man and now we have the *happy* man. What do we do when we are happy? Are we to complain? No! We are to "*sing Psalms.*" Psalms is praises. Praises are dedicated to thanksgiving unto God and glorifying God for who He is and what He has done. Therefore, there may not be many *merry* people in this world. I appreciate being around those in God's family who are *merry*. Being *merry* is legal! I love to hear people praise God and give Him glory.

Being *merry* is contagious. If you are happy the person on the pew may also become happy. In days gone by, a saint would get happy in the church and soon the entire church was happy. I like that atmosphere in the house of God. However, we must be careful! When we openly express our *affliction*, others may get afflicted- oh no! Martha complained openly to the Lord and soon "*merry Mary*" complained to the Lord. You may say "I have nothing to be happy about. My bills are past-due. My rent is going up. Fuel costs a fortune." But wait...Luke 10:20 instructs us "*Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.*" My name is written in heaven when my shoulder is hurting. My name is written in heaven when the price of fuel goes through the roof. My name is written in heaven when the rent goes up. We are never without a reason to be *merry* if we are born-again.

Now we come in verse 14 to the “*sick*” people. What does it mean to be “*sick*?” *Sick* refers to diseased. A person who has a sprained joint is not *sick* but is *afflicted* as described in verse 13. A person who has a common cold is not *sick* even if they feel like a bus ran over them. Examples of sickness are the person with cancer raging in their body or the person with debilitating MS.

What do we do when we are sick? We were told in verse 13 when we are *afflicted* to pray for ourselves. However, verse 14 says when we are *sick*, “*let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.*” When we are *sick*, we enlist others to pray for us. At one time, I was sick. I could get no relief. Months went by, but no relief. I called the elders and church members to pray for me. I needed the help of God, and I appreciate others joining me in prayer for healing.

Who is an *elder* as spoken of in verse 14? An elder is a *man* who is *senior in his spiritual* state. In other words, an *elder* is a man who is mature in the Lord, knowledgeable in God’s Word, and walking by faith. An elder is not necessarily old in human years. I know men saved 40 years that do not qualify as elders. They have no Godly spirituality about them. They have plenty of fleshly spirit. They will tell you a dirty joke. They have never studied the Bible and thus, never grew in the Lord. I will not call them when I need prayer. Once a lady told me she was an elder. She is not, for she is not a male. Generally speaking, Pentecostals are often confused for, in my experience, they call both men and women elders.

Verse 15 is interesting. It gives the promise that “*the prayer of faith shall save the sick.*” This verse is often a source of confusion. Because of the words “*and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him,*” some believe all sick people are sick because they have sinned. This is a dreadful, unfortunate interpretation of this verse. Not all sickness is a result of sin, though in some cases the sickness may be God’s punishment for sin. Job was sick and was not a sinner. Apostle Paul was sick and was not a sinner.

What is the meaning of the reference to sin in verse 15? Before you pray for healing and call others to pray with you for your healing, get your heart healed first. The heart always takes priority over the body. If there is sin in your heart, first get it out or God has no obligation to hear your prayer for physical healing. We are not to partake of the Lord’s Supper (sometimes called communion) with unconfessed sin in our life. Likewise, we are not to pray a prayer for healing from physical sickness until sin in our heart is first forgiven.

(5:16-18)

Verse 16 says “*confess your faults one to another.*” Again, this verse is sometimes a point of confusion. Let us use this example: I am not going to stand before you and describe in detail a bad thought I had and ask you to help me pray about it. I will, however, stand before you and ask you to pray for the weakness of my mind that I may have a more Godly mind so that I won’t have bad thoughts. A *fault* is a recurring weakness. A bad thought is *one* result of the faulty mind. If we confess our faults and ask others to pray for us, the *fault* can be *healed*. Unfortunately, we are unwilling to do this. For every prayer request for a fault to be healed in the life of a believer, there will be 10,000 prayer requests for physical healing. If you have a fault, ask God to heal it, and ask others to pray with you to find healing.

“*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*” What is the meaning of the word “effectual?” *Effectual* means effective. Consider this example: insect repellent is an effectual protection against bugs. I sure desire to know how to pray in an effectual manner, don’t you? Well, James tells us how. First, the prayer must be *fervent*. Fervent means “hot, burning, glowing.” I am not sure how many “bedtime prayers” God answers. Are you willing to pray for a need in your life until sweat drops off your brow? Secondly, prayer must be prayed from a *righteous* heart. Get your sin forgiven before you pray to God. There is one prayer He hears from a sinner and that is the prayer of repentance. A righteous man’s fervent prayer *will* be heard by God.

Verse 17 gives us an example of a righteous man’s *fervent* prayer. The man is Elijah. Read more about his prayer in I Kings 17 and 18. We often point to the weather as to something man has no control over. Yet, one man stopped rain from falling on the earth for 3 ½ years! Imagine such a prayer! In days gone by, Christian farmers experiencing drought would gather and pray for rain. When they went into the church, the sky was blue. When they came out, it was raining. WOW- the power of prayer.

(5:19-20)

James 1:16 says “*Do not err my beloved brethren.*” Do *brethren*, that is, believers, err? They surely do for James is now addressing that situation. I wish it were impossible for a believer to stray, but it is not. To err is to stray from God’s pathway for your life. There are many ways to err. This verse 19 speaks about erring from “the truth.” To you and me, truth is the Bible. At times, a believer may deviate from the truth. Do we kill the person who errs? Do we nail him to a cross? No. We seek to “convert” the one who has erred. What is the

meaning of convert? Convert means to “change back to the truth.”

Preachers stand in the pulpit and challenge believers who have erred to *convert*. The preacher is not angry toward you or mad at you. He is fulfilling James 5:19-20. What is this business of pouting and getting upset and bothered when someone who cares about you tries to steer you out of the ditch back onto the roadway? If your mother or father or brother who lives for God comes to you and attempts to convert you, why do you get upset? Are you saved? I do not believe verses 19 and 20 restrict who can care about an erring believer. It is not the Pastor only, but all in the congregation should care about erring members.

People who have erred will not always convert. If the erring person does not convert, they will die a spiritual death, according to verse 20. Furthermore, that person will sink further into sin. Those who stay true to the precepts of God’s Word are not to approve of the sin of the erring person. All believers are commanded to live righteous and holy and not to walk the sinner’s walk. It is the right thing to pray for erring believers, warn them of where they are going wrong, and encourage them. However, I, for one, am not going to approve of sin. Not mine, my families, or anyone’s sin.