

October to December 2008

“James”

by

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About the Author



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WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 1

MATTHEW 4:18-22

ACTS 12:1-2

“He killed James the brother of John with the sword.”

AUTHOR — THE APOSTLE

James, the son of Zebedee, and brother of John, was one of the Apostles of Jesus Christ. He is mentioned quite frequently in the Gospels (Matt 4:21, 10:2, 17:1; Mk 1:19, 29, 3:17, 5:37, 9:2, 10:35, 41, 13:3, 14:33; Lk 5:10, 6:14, 8:51, 9:28, 54). He belonged to the inner group of Jesus' disciples which consisted of only two others, namely, Peter and John (cf Mk 1:29-31, Lk 8:51, Matt 17:1, 26:37). The Lord chose these three to be closest to Him for a purpose. They saw and heard things from the Lord's mouth which the rest did not. It is possible that they were thus chosen for a two-fold ministry of not just preaching but also *writing* His inspired words. Peter has two epistles to his credit. John wrote the fourth Gospel, three epistles, and the book of Revelation. What about James? It is unlikely that he was left out. We should consider James the son of Zebedee as a prime candidate for the authorship of the Epistle of James.

Although most commentators consider James, the Lord's brother, to be the author of this Epistle, the likelihood that James the son of Zebedee could be the author instead should not be easily dismissed. The fact that the Epistle reflects a close dependence on the words of Jesus suggests that the author was a close disciple of the Lord during His earthly ministry. Compare the following sayings as found in James 1:5 and Matthew 7:7, Luke 11:9; James 2:5 and Matthew 5:3; James 3:18 and Matthew 5:9; James 4:4 and Mark 8:38; James 5:1-4 and Luke 6:24; and James 5:12 and Matthew 5:34-37.

It is also significant to note that the Jewish orientation of the Epistle fits very well the early part of the first century church. That the author does not refer to Gentiles or related subjects may well point to the time in history of the early church when Gentiles were only beginning to be reached with the gospel. There is no reason why the Epistle should be dated late. It is thus possible that James, the son of Zebedee, was the writer of the Epistle before he was martyred in AD 44 by the wicked Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:1-2).

QUESTION: What does it mean to be martyred for Christ?

PRAYER: Lord, I want to be faithful unto death (Rev 2:10).

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 2

JAMES 1:1-4

JAMES 5:9-20

“My brethren, count it all joy.”

THE EPISTLE—A SERMON

The Epistle of James has characteristics of a sermon, or exhortation. In fact, James went right into sermon style from chapter 1 and verse 2: *“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.”* The Epistle also ends with an exhortation, *“Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him: Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins”* (5:19-20).

Indeed, this Epistle is full of commands. It contains no less than 54 imperatives. It is also full of application. There are 47 occurrences of the personal pronoun in the second person (i.e. “you”). Thus, direct application, a necessary element in sermons, is not wanting in James.

The Epistle of James seeks also to exhort and persuade. James has every official and moral authority to do this, being an Apostle of Jesus Christ and a godly leader disciplined by the Lord Himself. The Apostle James as a spiritual leader of the Church sought to encourage godly conduct especially in times of trials and temptations. He encouraged his readers to follow the example of Christ instead of the ways of the world (Jas 1:27, 4:4). The Epistle is full of such exhortation and dissuasion (i.e. be this...do not be that; cf 1:19-23, 3:1, 5:7-9).

In the Church today, there is a dire need for such faithful pastors and preachers like the Apostle James who will spare no effort and mince no words to denounce sin and error, hypocrisy and evil, and charge the people to repent of their wicked and false ways. There are many a great pulpiteer today, and they make the congregation feel jolly good about themselves. But if any one will hear a Spirit-filled preacher of the Holy Scriptures, he should go away feeling displeased about himself. When the people go away feeling badly about themselves after hearing a sermon, the preacher has done a faithful job, and this is “the highest accolade that can be bestowed upon a preacher” (C Simmons). The Apostle James does precisely this in this Epistle.

QUESTION: Is an offensive sermon an unedifying sermon?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be self-critical in the light of Your Word.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 3

JAMES 1:1-4

ACTS 9:1-2

*“To the twelve tribes
which are scattered abroad.”*

AN EPISTLE FOR EVERY CHURCH

The Epistle of James is one of the Catholic or General Epistles. The word “Catholic” here does not mean Roman Catholic. The word “catholic” means “universal.” It is a universal epistle because it is not addressed to any specific local church, but to the church at large; in this case, to the dispersed Jewish Church (1:1).

The other Catholic Epistles are: 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude. Plus James, there are a total of seven Catholic Epistles. Although the latter two Epistles of John were addressed to an individual, they are classified as catholic because they are seen together with First John which addressed its readers as “little children” (2:1, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4, i.e. Christians in general) which are the main or primary ones.

The Epistle was written in a time when the Church was greatly persecuted and tempted (Acts 9:1-2). In the midst of persecution, some believers may be asking the question: “Why do bad things happen to good people?” Others may be thinking that their salvation in Christ gives them the licence to sin. They think they can do what they like since grace guarantees them salvation no matter what.

The purpose of James was thus to encourage the persecuted saints to persevere in their faith (1:1-4), and to admonish the worldly Christians to check their own faith to see if it is genuine or not; for saving faith is a living, active faith (2:20).

We are living in a day of persecution and temptation also. This world is not friendly to Christians who obey the Lord and His Word, not wanting to compromise their faith in any way. Jesus calls us to be faithful unto the end, *“be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life”* (Rev 2:10).

QUESTION: In what ways are Christians being persecuted today?

PRAYER: Lord, keep me faithful to You, never to deny You nor shame You.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 4

JAMES 1:1-4

DEUTERONOMY 15:12-18

“He shall be thy servant forever.”

JAMES — AN APOSTLE AND A SLAVE

The writer introduced himself *“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”* The Apostle James, the son of Zebedee, was most likely the one who wrote this Epistle. It is interesting to note that some Greek manuscripts (e.g. 6th century P33) has the title as *“The General Epistle of James the Apostle,”* or *“The General Epistle of the Holy Apostle James.”*

James described himself as *“a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”* The word *“servant”* here is the Greek *doulos* which is a more humbling word than the usual *diakonos*, *“servant.”* *Doulos* literally means *“bond slave.”* It comes from the verbal root *deo* which means *“to bind.”* A *doulos* is one who is a slave who is bound to serve his master for life. The word *doulos* is also a word from which the verb *douleuo* is derived which in modern Greek means *“to work, and to work hard.”*

The Old Testament Law allows the slave freed from bondage to become a slave of his master for life, out of personal choice and love: *“And it shall be, if he say unto thee, I will not go away from thee; because he loveth thee and thine house, because he is well with thee; Then thou shalt take an aul, and thrust it through his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever”* (Deut 15:16-17). In the Judeo-Christian context, a bond slave is thus one who is totally given over to do the will and bidding of his master or lord not out of compulsion but out of love (Matt 8:9).

As Christians, we are bond slaves of Christ. We should be diligent in obeying God’s Word, serving Him unconditionally, and doing our very best in any work He has assigned or called us to do all the days of our life, and all because we love Him.

QUESTION: If the Lord were to call me to full-time Christian ministry, would I obey and answer His call?

PRAYER: Lord, I love You and want to serve You for the rest of my life.

LORD'S DAY, OCTOBER 5

JAMES 1:1-4

JOHN 15:18-20

"They will also persecute you."

PERSECUTION AND DISPERSION

James addressed his letter to *"the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad."* The *"twelve tribes"* is distinctly a Jewish term referring to Israel (Gen 49:28, Exod 28:21, Deut 1:23, Josh 3:12). James was thus addressing his Epistle to people of his own race—the Jews. The appeal to Abraham as *"our father"* (2:21), and other OT figures like Rahab (2:25), Job (5:11), and Elijah (5:17) point to a Jewish audience. The writer assumes the familiarity of his readers with the OT Law (1:25, 2:8-13), and their meeting place as the synagogue (2:2).

It should be added that the addressees were Jews who professed to be believers. This we see from the context of the Epistle itself where the name of the Lord Jesus Christ has been invoked (1:1). James also called them *"brethren"* who are in *"the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (2:1).

The *"twelve tribes which are scattered abroad"* thus refers to Christian Jews who have been scattered to other parts of the Roman Empire due to the persecution in Jerusalem. In Acts 11:19, we read that the Christian Jews in Jerusalem *"were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen."* And they were dispersed *"as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch."*

Why were the Jewish Christians persecuted? They were persecuted simply because they believed the Lord Jesus Christ to be the Messiah, the Son of God, and their personal Saviour. The Lord had already warned of hatred and persecution for those who belong to Him, *"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. ... Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also"* (John 15:18-20). The Apostle Paul said, *"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution"* (2 Tim 3:12).

QUESTION: What kind of persecution have I faced as a Christian?

PRAYER: Lord, help me not to deny You in the face of persecution.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 6

JAMES 1:2-8

MATTHEW 5:10-12

*“Blessed are they
which are persecuted.”*

OVERCOMING TRIALS WITH JOY

James enjoined his fellow brethren to consider it all joy whenever they fall into various trials. The word “*count*” or “*consider*” here is in the imperative mood. Believers are commanded to count it a joyful thing to go through persecution, trials, hardships, and sufferings on account of their faith. It is not just to be joyful for a moment but to be always joyful, to be totally and completely joyful.

The word “*temptation*” (*peirasmos*) can either mean (1) testing i.e. “to try to learn the nature or character of someone or something by submitting such to thorough and extensive testing,” or (2) temptation i.e. “to endeavour or attempt to cause someone to sin.” The word “*temptation*” is used by James in two ways: (1) the trials and testings that afflict the Christian from without (1:2-12), and (2) the motivation and desire to sin that afflict the Christian from within (1:13-15). The temptations or rather trials of the first kind God allows in the life of believers to perfect or mature their faith, hence the cause for rejoicing (1:2). But the temptation of the second kind, namely the strong desire to sin, does not find its source in God but the sinful nature of depraved humanity (Jer 17:9, Rom 7:14-25).

Trials can come in many forms. The word *poikilois* means of various kinds. There are different kinds of trials or sufferings—bereavement, sickness, poverty, etc. But each time such a temptation or trial that comes from without hits us, we should face it joyfully. In this case, the Christian Jews were facing persecution. They had to flee Jerusalem because of intense persecution from their own national brothers (e.g. Saul of Tarsus in whose hands Stephen died). The infant church of Jerusalem suffered no less than 5 persecutions as recorded in Acts: (1) 4:1-22, (2) 5:17-42, (3) 6:8-15, (4) 8:1-3, and (5) 12:1-4. Even in such situations, James said, “*Count it pure joy.*” “Man’s disappointments are God’s appointments.” There is a purpose in trials and testings.

QUESTION: How is it possible for a believer not to be depressed or sorrowful in times of persecution?

PRAYER: Lord, grant me Your grace to go through persecution joyfully.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 7

JAMES 1:2-8

JAMES 5:10-11

*“The trying of your
faith worketh patience.”*

WHY SUFFERING

“Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience” (Jas 1:3). The present tense of the word *ginosko*, “know,” “recognise,” or “understand,” is significant. The persecuted Jews were perhaps very dejected that they had to go through so much hardship. James here encourages them that they should begin to understand that there is a reason or purpose for such hardships in the Christian life.

God is putting our faith to the test. The faith here refers to our belief and trust in Jesus for salvation. The Epistle of James is really first of all an Epistle of faith. Faith is mentioned before works. There can be no works when there is no faith. Faith must always come first.

The word for “trying” is *dokimion*. It means “to try to learn the genuineness of something by examination and testing, often through actual use.” By way of illustration, students of the Far Eastern Bible College are subjected to a lot of assignments, research papers, collateral readings, lectures, extra-curricular duties, tests and examinations to ascertain the kind of students they are, whether good or bad, genuine or false. When a student passes all the tests, he will be awarded a diploma indicating that he is an approved student of the school and now ready for work or service.

The testing of one’s faith produces *hupomone*, “patience” or “fortitude.” The word *hupomone* (literally “to remain under”) denotes the “capacity to continue to bear up under difficult circumstances.” It illustrates the capacity to remain under pressure. It is a “never say die” attitude. A person with such endurance will not give up easily even under extremely trying circumstances. *“Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy”* (Jas 5:10-11).

QUESTION: What sufferings have I experienced that have made me to become a better Christian?

PRAYER: Lord, build up my faith in times of pain.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 8

JAMES 1:2-8

ROMANS 12:1-2

“Let patience have her perfect work.”

SPIRITUAL MATURITY

“And let patience have her perfect work” (Jas 1:4). The ability and capacity to endure is not an overnight work, but involves time. The word for “maturing” is the adjective *teleion*. It speaks of a process—a gradual and constant development towards spiritual maturity. This is explained by the subsequent purpose clause, *“that ye may be perfect (teleioi) and entire (holokleroi), wanting nothing.”* One is perfect, that is not lagging behind in any point when one is patient and forbearing. James also called the royal law of freedom which is the commandment to love one’s neighbour (Jas 2:8), *“perfect”* (Jas 1:25), because this alone makes men really free (cf. John 8:31f; Gal 5:13).

Our God by nature is perfect, and the gifts that come from Him by nature must be perfect too (Jas 1:17). His gifts are perfect because they are good gifts which cause us to mature in Christ. According to James, the man who does not offend in his words is a spiritually mature man and without fault (Jas 3:2). The reason for trials and sufferings is to increase the Christian’s stamina to endure hardships. The capacity to endure will shape Christian character and make a man mature and whole in Christ in terms of his mental and emotional, physical and spiritual constitution.

We should always welcome God’s work in our lives to mould and shape us to become more and more like Christ, and this might involve pain when He hammers and chisels away our rough spots.

*Little by little in every day, little
by little in every way
Jesus is changing me, He’s
changing me.*

*Since I made a turnabout face,
and I’m walking in His grace
Jesus is changing me.*

*He’s changing me, my blessed
Saviour.*

*I’m not the same person that I
used to be.*

*Though it’s a slow growing, but
there’s a knowing*

That someday perfect I will be.

QUESTION: How has my life been different since I knew Christ?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, keep changing me until I become like Christ.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 9

JAMES 1:2-8

HEBREWS 4:14-16

*“If any of you lack wisdom,
let him ask of God.”*

HELP IN TRIALS

It is a fact that man needs wisdom. Some may need more, others less, but everyone needs wisdom. Everyone should recognise the need for wisdom. Wisdom comes from God. If we need wisdom, we should seek God for it, and He is ever willing and generous to give it to those who sincerely ask for it (Jas 1:5).

What is this “*wisdom*”? James has been speaking of the necessity of trials and testings and the need to be thankful for them because of the spiritual good that comes out of them. To those who feel or think that this is a difficult truth to understand or accept, James told them to ask the Lord for wisdom. According to Calvin, “to be wise is to submit to God in the endurance of evils, under a due conviction that he so orders all things as to promote our salvation; yet the sentence may be generally applied to every branch of right knowledge.”

God alone is the Giver of wisdom. God assures the one who seeks wisdom that He will give (1) *haplos* meaning “simply, sincerely, openly,” and (2) *me oneidizontos*, translated “without reproach,” “without reviling,” or “without heaping insults.” God will not turn away the sincere and genuine seeker. So the encouragement is: “If you don’t understand or can’t accept the truth just taught, don’t be afraid to ask God for help.” He knows our weakness and is ever ready to help us: “*Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*” (Heb 4:14-16).

QUESTION: Have I experienced God hearing my cries and answering my prayers, delivering me from my troubles and providing for my needs?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, keep me from evil and protect me from the devil.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10

JAMES 1:2-8

JOHN 20:24-29

*“Let him ask in faith,
nothing wavering.”*

NEVER DOUBT GOD

The seeker of wisdom must do so with a proper attitude. *“But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed”* (Jas 1:6). This verse instructs the Christian to pray in faith (i.e. trusting and believing that God is faithful to His promise, and will provide help whenever we ask for it in accordance to His will). This faith is an unwavering faith.

The word *“wavering”* is the Greek *diakrinomenos* which is a compound comprising the preposition *dia*, “through,” and the verb *krino*, “to judge” or “to separate between two things.” Here it has the idea of having two minds, to be uncertain of God’s ability, to doubt that the thing prayed for will ever come to pass. Prayers offered with such an unbelieving mind and a trustless heart will not be heard by God: *“For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man (dipsuchos, literally, “two-souled”) is unstable in all his ways”* (Jas 1:7-8).

*How often we trust each other,
And only doubt our Lord.
We take the word of mortals,
And yet distrust His Word.*

*But, Oh, what light and glory,
Would shine o’er all our days.
If we always would remember
God means just what He says.*

—Anonymous

QUESTION: What can cause me to doubt God and His Word?

PRAYER: Lord, increase my faith in You and Your words.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11

JAMES 1:9-11

JAMES 2:5-6

*“Let the brother
of low degree rejoice.”*

POOR YET RICH

“Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted” (v 9). The word *tapeinos* translated “of low degree” in the KJV has the following semantic range: (1) positional lowliness, i.e. low position, or power; (2) emotional lowliness, i.e. dejected, downhearted, downcast; and (3) dispositional lowliness, i.e. humility, gentleness, softspokenness. But the context here allows for another category, namely, (4) financial lowliness, i.e. material poverty. The rich or wealthy (*plousios*) mentioned in verse 10 is contrasted with the poor or destitute (*tapeinos*). This is not surprising since Christian Jews became outcasts and outlaws of the religious and secular community on account of their faith. They were disowned by their own people, even families, and oftentimes their personal properties were confiscated (Mk 10:29 - 30). They also faced tremendous persecution from the Sanhedrin, Roman government, and general pagan populace (Acts 4:1, 16:19-24).

In such difficult times, James exhorted the Christians to “rejoice” or “take pride” (*kauchaomai*). Pride and boasting are often spoken of in negative terms in the Bible. Why did James tell the Christians to “take pride”? Like the word “anger,” or “jealousy,” there are times when such words are used in the good sense, like righteous indignation, and godly jealousy. James was using the word in the legitimate sense here. The word *kauchaomai* expresses an extremely high level of confidence in someone or something of exceptional worth and significance. Spiros Zodhiates correctly commented, “It is to profess loudly something that you have the right to be proud of, the companionship of God in your trials, which while you are so low makes you so high.” It is not a boasting of self, but of Christ. It is to unashamedly proclaim the goodness of God for what He has done for us on the cross, for His ever present help in times of trouble, and for His preservation of us till He returns. Though we may be materially poor, we are spiritually rich.

QUESTION: What must I do to be rich in heaven?

PRAYER: Lord, I want the riches of heaven, not earth.

LORD'S DAY, OCTOBER 12

JAMES 1:9-11

LUKE 12:15-21

*"But the rich ...
he shall pass away."*

RICH YET POOR

The rich is not as powerful as he thinks. In the sight of God, he is like the grass which withers away under the scorching heat of the sun. The illustration seeks to present two principles for the rich man: (1) Money is not everything. Riches cannot buy a man time. It cannot prevent him from dying when his time to go arrives. He will pass away. The word *pareleusetai*, "to pass away," is written in the future tense. Here it is best taken as a progressive future. The rich man and his wealth will gradually be depleted as time goes on. Wealth, property and power are only temporary things. They will not last forever. The rich man will die without his riches. Man is really weak and frail, and wealth cannot protect him from the day of death and judgment. Someone has defined money this way: "Money is an article which may be used as a universal passport to everywhere except heaven and as a universal provider of everything except happiness."

With money comes responsibility. The rich man is likened to grass. The word *chorton* can also mean "a field" or "a pasture" — a small patch of grass reproduces itself till it becomes a huge field. It is illustrative of the rich man who hoards his money for self gratification and never uses his wealth to help the poor and needy. The time will come when such riches will be of no use to anybody, or for anything. For while he goes about feverishly to make more money on one of his business trips (*poereiais*; see Jas 5:1-6), he wears himself out (*maranthesetai*). Sickness can strike anytime, and one's riches would gradually be drained away.

The rich man in his pride said, "*Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God*" (Luke 12:19-21).

QUESTION: Is money the root of all evil? See 1 Timothy 6:10.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to serve You and not money.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 13

JAMES 1:12

MATTHEW 10:22

*“Blessed is the man
that endureth temptation”*

WHY TESTING

“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.” The temptations here are trials and testings that hit the Christian from the outside like poverty, persecution, sickness, etc. The beatitude, *“Blessed”* (*makarios*, cf Matt 5:3-11, Lk 6:20-22), is applied to the Christian who *“endureth”* such difficult circumstances in life. The word *“blessed”* or *“happy”* has a special sense in the Christian context. It is the spiritual ability to experience joy and peace even in times of adversity or calamity. Calvin says it *“is fortitude of mind in enduring adversities.”*

The word *“endureth”* (*hupomenei*) is the verb form of the noun, *hupomone*, translated *“patience”* in James 1:3-4. Verse 12 ties up quite nicely with verse 3. The exhortation began with the purpose of testing in verse 3 and ends with the result of testing in verse 12.

Verse 3: *“trying” dokimion* → *“endurance” hupomonen* = purpose of testing.

Verse 12: *“endureth” hupomonei* → *“tried” dokimos* = result of testing.

God does not allow testings to come our way for no reason at all. The reason for testing is to prove the genuineness of our faith. In learning to patiently endure trials we become Christians who are proved, and mature in the faith. One evidence of a truly saved person is that he will not deny the faith even in the midst of trying circumstances and intense suffering. He will patiently overcome them and through it all come out a stronger Christian. Saving faith is a faith which *endures* (Matt 10:22, 24:13, Mk 13:13).

QUESTION: How may I respond to the pressures and stresses of life in a way that glorifies God?

PRAYER: Lord, grant me the grace to go through the pressures and stresses this life brings.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 14

JAMES 1:12

REVELATION 2:8-11

*“When he is tried,
he shall receive the crown of life.”*

CROWN OF LIFE

The genuine Christian will at the end receive “*a crown of life*” or “a crown which is life.” This does not mean that eternal life has to be earned. Eternal life is a free gift graciously granted to a person by God when he by faith believes in the Lord Jesus Christ (John 3:16, Eph 2:8-9).

Calvin commented that it is wrong to “infer that we by fighting merit the crown; for since God has gratuitously appointed it for us, our fighting only renders us fit to receive it. He adds, that it is promised to those who love God. By speaking thus, he means not that the love of man is the cause of obtaining the crown, (for God anticipates us by his gratuitous love;) but he only intimates that the elect who love him are alone approved by God.”

Yet our ability to love Him and hence receive the reward is not intrinsic to us. The initiative of love is not ours but God’s: “*We love him, because he first loved us*” (1 John 4:19). There is divine sovereignty and human responsibility. This is clearly stated in Philippians 2:12, “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*”

*Lord, here I take my cross, now to
follow thee.*

*Worldly gain, empty fame are but
dross to me.*

*Men may sneer, men may jeer, pain
may come or stay;*

*Naught can cause me to stray from
the narrow way.*

*Through His Word, by His grace, I
would faithful be.*

*Till at last I reach home, there’s a
crown for me,*

*A bright crown for me, yes a crown
for me.*

QUESTION: Why is eternal life described as a crown?

PRAYER: Lord, I want this crown of life that is found in Jesus Christ.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 15

JAMES 1:13-15

1 JOHN 2:15-17

“God cannot be tempted with evil.”

EVIL TEMPTATION

For verse 13, it is important to note that James was talking of a different kind of temptation from that of verse 12. The temptation of verse 12 refers to trials and testings that hit the Christian from without. It refers to adverse circumstances of life and not to something which you yourself are responsible. The temptation of verse 13, on the other hand, has to do with inner desires or lusts. It refers to our propensity to sin, our desire to yield to evil or lustful thoughts. It is the kind of temptation that stems from the sinful recesses of the human heart. It is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16).

Calvin himself wrote, “Here, no doubt, he speaks of another kind of temptation. It is abundantly evident that the external temptations, hitherto mentioned, are sent to us by God. In this way God tempted Abraham, (Gen. xxii.1,) and daily tempts us, that is, he tries us as to what we are by laying down before us an occasion by which our hearts are made known. But to draw out what is hid in our hearts is a far different thing from inwardly alluring our hearts by wicked lusts.

“He then treats here of inward temptations, which are nothing else than the inordinate desires which entice to sin. He justly denies that God is the author of these, because they flow from the corruption of our nature.”

This understanding of “*temptation*” is supported by James’s explanation that (1) God is not the author of such temptations, and that (2) such temptations are evil or bad (*kakon*) in the moral or ethical sense. God is untemptable (*apeirastos*), and He does not tempt man to sin.

“But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed” (v14). The numerical adjective “each man” has a universal ring to it. Each man without exception experiences sinful cravings. The source of moral evil is in sinful man himself.

QUESTION: What evidences are there to prove that man is full of sin?

PRAYER: Lord, have mercy on me a sinner.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 16

JAMES 1:13-15

PSALM 51

“Drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.”

BORN IN SIN

Every man born into this world is born in sin and will experience temptations. The fact that the word “*tempted*” is here written in the present tense (*peirazetai*) indicates that it is not a one time experience. Every human being will have to face temptations throughout the course of his earthly life. The source of the temptation is the individual himself. This is indicated by the Greek preposition of direct agency *hupo*. Man is the active agent of his own temptation experience. The word *epithumias* is a strong word for desire. It is sometimes used in a good sense (Lk 22:15, Phil 1:23, 1 Thess 2:17), but it is usually used in the bad sense of lustful desires. Such lustful desires stem from within the heart of sinful man.

When a man is tempted by his own lusts, he is described as being lured and enticed (Jas 1:14 cf. Prov 7). The 2 verbs are written in the passive voice. There is an external element involved in the temptation. The person is tempted by something he has seen, heard, or read. Something from without has triggered his sinful desires (e.g. 2 Sam 11:2—David saw Bathsheba bathing and was tempted to commit adultery). The words “*lured*” and “*enticed*” were applied to the hunter or the fisherman, who “*lures*” (*exelkein*) his prey from its place of refuge and “*entices*” it (*deleakein*) by bait (*delear*) to his trap, hook, or net.

Man’s own evil nature is the root of all his sinful thoughts, deeds, and words. Man is his own tempter; he tempts himself, and allows himself to be tempted by the devil.

“Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (v15). The act of sin is a process. James used the life-cycle of man as an analogy. The sin process involves (1) conception, (2) birth, (3) growth, (4) death. In other words, the effects of sin are sure and certain. If temptation is not arrested and resisted at the very outset it will germinate and ultimately produce destructive results.

QUESTION: How am I able to overcome temptations?

PRAYER: Lord, let me not fall into temptation; keep me from evil.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 17

JAMES 1:16-18

ROMANS 8:28-39

*“Every good gift and every perfect gift
is from above.”*

GOD’S GOOD AND PERFECT GIFTS

James commanded his readers not to be misled or deceived into thinking that God is a tempter. God does not tempt anyone to sin. The present tense of the Greek imperative *planasthe* with the negative *me* probably tells us that the prohibition deals with a situation that was already existing. The people were already thinking this way—that God tempts them with evil. James commanded them to arrest immediately this false notion. The prohibition may be rendered thus, “Stop *being* misled.”

James went on to explain the nature and character of God. What kind of God do Christians have? God is not a tempter but a giver. And what kind of gifts does He bestow? The gifts of God are described as “good” (*agathe*), and “perfect” (*teleion*). The gifts of God are morally good, and wholesome. The word *teleion* tells us the gifts that come from the Lord “has a purpose, has a goal. ... all of God’s gifts have as their end the accomplishment of God’s purpose in our lives, and that is perfection” (Zodhiates). The Lord does not tempt but tries us so that we may be “perfect (*teleioi*) and entire, wanting nothing” (1:4). The gifts come “from above,” that is, from heaven. There is no evil in heaven. All gifts that come from heaven are therefore pure, and are bestowed continually by God.

Let us never blame God when we suffer for our own sins and mistakes. We must know that God is always good and right, no matter what. Never doubt, question, murmur or complain against God. Always thank Him, praise Him, love Him and honour Him for all things. For “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28).

QUESTION: What are the good and perfect gifts I have received from God?

PRAYER: Lord, let me count my blessings and name them one by one.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18

JAMES 1:16-18

MATTHEW 7:7-11

*“And cometh down from
the Father of lights.”*

THE FATHER OF LIGHTS

God gives good gifts because He is “*the Father of lights.*” The plural “*lights*” here indicates that God is not only (1) the Creator of the physical light, i.e. the sun, moon, and stars, but also (2) the Giver of spiritual light, i.e. knowledge, discernment, wisdom (cf. Jas 1:5). 1 John 1:5 tells us that “*God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*” Only good can come out of God. When His children pray for certain things, the Lord will always do what is best, and grant what is good for them. If you have asked the Lord for wisdom in times of difficulty, the Lord will surely give it. Jesus Himself taught, “*Ask, and it shall be given you, seek, and ye shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?*” (Matt 7:7-11). What kind of wisdom does God give? James said in 3:17; “*But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.*”

James went on to assure his readers that God, who is our heavenly Father, does not change. He is always good. He is the same, yesterday, today and forever (cf. Heb 13:8). One will not find Him good one day, and evil the next. We can have confidence in the one living and true God who is unchangeable.

QUESTION: How can I differentiate between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world?

PRAYER: Lord, with so many wolves in sheep’s clothing today, grant me the wisdom and discernment to tell truth from error, good from evil.

LORD'S DAY, OCTOBER 19

JAMES 1:16-18

EPHESIANS 2:8-9

"Of his own will begat he us."

GOD'S BEST GIFT

Now what good gift have we received from the Lord? What better gift is there than the gift of salvation—being made a child of God? James said that God has begotten us by means of the gospel. This verse is explained by John 1:12-13, *"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."* James said likewise with emphasis that we have been born into the family of God, not according to our merits, but solely *"of his own will."* God is determined to save His people from their sins and give them new life by the word of truth. This is one proof text to show that our salvation is based purely on God's will and not ours.

The purpose of making us His children is so that we might be a *"kind of first fruits of his creatures."* The idea of *"first fruits"* goes back to the OT (e.g. Lev 23:10) where the first portion of the harvest is set apart for God. It is the most precious part of the harvest, and rightfully belongs to Him. In the same way, Christians are the choicest of all His creation.

If God has given us His best, how can we not but give Him our best, yes, even our all with love and gratitude?

*Give of your best to the Master;
Give of the strength of your youth;
Throw your soul's fresh, glowing
ardour
Into the battle for truth.
Jesus has set the example;
Dauntless was He, young and
brace;
Give Him your loyal devotion,
Give Him the best that you have.*

—H B Grose

QUESTION: Is man totally depraved or only somewhat depraved?

PRAYER: Lord, I cannot save myself, please save me.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 20

JAMES 1:19-21

PSALM 62

“Be swift to hear.”

HEARING GOD’S WORD

The Epistle of James is an extremely practical epistle—full of “do,” or “be” injunctions. There are those who claimed to be Christian but did not behave like one. This section deals with the main theme of the epistle: What are the evidences of genuine faith? One of the evidences of true faith is the obedient reception of God’s Word (Jas 1:19-27).

The Word of God is central in this paragraph. The word *logos* appears four times here (Jas 1:18, 21, 22, 23). Several figures are used for the Word: it is likened to (1) truth (v18), (2) a seed (v21), (3) a mirror (v23), and (4) the Law (v25).

There is a vital need to hear God’s Word. *“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath”* (Jas 1:19).

The word *“wherefore”* links this passage to the previous verse which is verse 18. Since the Lord has adopted us as His sons (note that James addressed them as his *“beloved brethren.”* This term *“beloved”* has been used by other NT writers to refer to believers [1 Cor 15:58, Heb 6:9, 2 Pet 3:17, 1 John 3:2, Jude 20]. Having saved us through His Word of truth, how ought we to behave as the children of God?

James said that priority and emphasis should be placed on listening rather than speaking. This is taught in the OT especially in the wisdom literature written by Solomon—the wisest man ever to live on earth. With regard to hearing, we have (1) Proverbs 1:5, *“A wise man will hear, and will increase learning: and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels.”* (2) Proverbs 12:15, *“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.”* (3) Proverbs 19:20, *“Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.”* (4) Psalm 62:11, *“God hath spoken once; twice have I heard.”* God gave us one mouth but two ears to teach us this good lesson—listen more, speak less.

QUESTION: Why are people often quick to speak but slow to hear?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to listen more, especially to Your good words that come from the Holy Scriptures.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 21

JAMES 1:19-21

ECCLESIASTES 5:1-2

“Slow to speak.”

SILENCE IS GOLDEN

With regard to speaking, we have (1) Proverbs 10:19, *“In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.”* (2) Proverbs 13:3, *“He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.”* (3) Proverbs 17:27-28, *“He that hath knowledge spareth his words: ... Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.”* (4) Proverbs 21:23, *“Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.”* “Silence is golden” is good advice.

The above may be applied to two areas: (1) ecclesially, and (2) colloquially. James may be applying it to a Church situation where the Scripture is being read out loud and the congregation listens. James told them to be quietly submissive to the words of Holy Writ; to assume the position of a pupil rather than a teacher. James elaborated more on this when he addressed the problem of the tongue in chapter 3. The wisdom in Ecclesiastes 5:1-2 applies, *“Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.”*

There may also be quarreling and disagreements in the church. This may be due to the fact that the people are not hearing each other out. The aggression by some in pushing their opinions or ideas may have caused the unhappiness of many. Those who did a lot of talking did not do the same in listening. The tongue has to be controlled (Jas 3:6). Any personal disagreements should be settled lovingly and peaceably. Instead much anger has been aroused. That is why James pointed out that there is also a need to be *“slow to wrath.”* Read Proverbs 14:29 and Ecclesiastes 7:9.

QUESTION: When is silence not golden?

PRAYER: Lord, let me praise You with all my heart through my lips.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22

JAMES 1:19-21

ECCLESIASTES 9:17

“Slow to wrath.”

A QUICK TEMPER?

“For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God” (Jas 1:20). James here gave the reason why a man should calm his temper. An angry man speaks on the basis of how he feels. He does not think before he speaks, nor does he listen to what others have to say. His outbursts are often without rationale and he becomes very unreasonable. The application here may again be twofold: with reference to (1) God, and (2) man. Calvin says that the anger here prevents this person from hearing God’s Word: “Wrath also, I think, is condemned with regard to the hearing which God demands to be given to him, as though making a tumult it disturbed and impeded him, for God cannot be heard except when the mind is calm and sedate. Hence, he adds, that as long as wrath bears rule there is no place for the righteousness of God. In short, except the heat of contention be banished, we shall never observe towards God that calm silence of which he has just spoken.”

This wrath may also be seen as directed against man. A man is angry at his fellow man because the latter is not impressed with his expressed opinions. How often in session or synod meetings do we hear of church leaders failing to come to an agreement because of anger? I have heard how one elder of a church when told of his error refused to admit his mistake, tells everyone to shut up, and accuses the session of treating him with disrespect. What was emotional almost became physical when he challenged the pastor to “step outside.”

Surely, *“the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.”* Solomon observed, *“The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools”* (Eccl 9:17).

QUESTION: Is anger always wrong?

PRAYER: Lord, grant me a calm spirit that will not get angry easily unless it is righteous anger.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 23

JAMES 1:19-21

MATTHEW 13:3-23

“Lay apart all filthiness.”

GOOD WORD BEFORE GOOD WORKS

“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (Jas 1:21). What would be James’s advice to those who are quick to get angry? It would be verse 21! He is to *“lay apart all filthiness.”* The word *“lay apart”* or *“put off”* is *apothemenoi* which is used elsewhere with reference to taking off of one’s dirty clothes (Acts 7:58). Paul is fond of using this word metaphorically to speak of the putting away of sins (Rom 13:12, Col 3:8, Eph 4:22, 25). The filth that is spoken of here is moral impurity.

Instead of being angry, a man ought to be gentle. Instead of being arrogant, he must be humble. The historical context of the epistle should not be ignored. James was addressing professing Christians who displayed no or very little spirituality in their lives. When confronted with their sins, they were likely to become angry. James says the correct response should be humility. The word of God has laid down certain rules. The laws of God are meant to protect us. It is for our own good to obey them. The *“implanted word”* is powerful unto salvation. The Word of God has already been sown in their hearts. And if the seed has fallen on good soil, it would bring forth fruit (Matt 13:3-23). James was perhaps also hinting that those who do not manifest any Christian grace may not be in possession of the implanted Word. It is important to note that James considered salvation to come by means of receiving the Word of God and not by doing the works of the flesh. The Good Word comes before the good works.

QUESTION: What are the filthy things in my life that I must put away?

PRAYER: Lord, cleanse me from every sin and set me free.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 24

JAMES 1:22-25

MATTHEW 7:13-29

“Be ye doers of the word.”

DOING GOD’S WORD

“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (Jas 1:22). God is not only concerned that we hear His Word, He also demands that we do His Word. Both mind and heart must be involved in the reception of God’s Word. The exercise of listening to and doing God’s Word is an ongoing one. It does not stop. The food that we eat is converted into energy. The spiritual process should be likewise.

If we only hear and do not do, we are deceiving ourselves. The word *paralogizomai*, “to deceive,” is used only twice in the NT. It is used in Colossians 2:4 of a deception that comes from the outside; *“And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.”* These are false teachers — *“grievous wolves enter in ... not sparing the flock”* (Acts 20:29). Here, it is referring to a deception that comes from the inside; we are beguiling ourselves. We become our own false teachers when we think that it is enough to hear God’s Word without obeying it.

“For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man upholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was” (Jas 1: 23-24). The word *“behold”* (*katanoeo*) implies more than a mere seeing. It means “to consider closely,” or “to understand completely.” It is more than a cursory look. This person who goes to the mirror, goes there to inspect his face. He knows exactly the condition of his face. It is dirty and he knows it. But he goes away without doing anything about it, thinking that it is clean when it is not. This is self delusion at the highest level.

QUESTION: What is hypocrisy?

PRAYER: Lord, help me as a Christian to walk my talk.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 25

JAMES 1:22-27

DEUTERONOMY 8:10-20

“Being not a forgetful hearer.”

A FORGETFUL HEARER?

“But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” (Jas 1:25). The Greek *parakupto* means “to bend over.” It has the idea of bending down in order to take a closer look (John 20:11). The hearer and doer of the Word is the one who takes the time and trouble to study the Bible carefully, and having studied it, sticks closely (*parameno*, “to continue,” “to remain”) to it. He seeks to observe every minute detail of the law of God. And the law of God is not a law of bondage, but a law of freedom. It is a law which sets one free from the bondage of sin when it is humbly received and obediently kept. Blessed is the man who is a doer of the law. The same beatitude is expressed in Revelation 1:3, *“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”*

“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain” (Jas 1:26). The word *dokei* may be translated in these two ways: (1) “If any man thinks he is religious,” or (2) “If any man appears to be religious.” It is better to take this word to mean appearance, for the word “religious” (*threskos*) refers to the outward form of religion. James is speaking of the man who appears religious because he observes all the ceremonial duties of his religion. This form-based religion is only a show, it may not be real. James was looking for a faith-based religion which is manifested by a person’s ability to control his tongue (i.e. “*slow to speak*” v19). Such outward religious show is deceptive, and empty.

QUESTION: Is forgetfulness a sin?

PRAYER: Lord, I thank You for remembering me and granting me Your grace. May I never be ungrateful to forget You.

LORD'S DAY, OCTOBER 26

JAMES 1:22-27

MATTHEW 23:13-33

"Be ye doers of the word."

TRUE RELIGION

Spirituality is not measured by the length of one's prayer. It is not the performing of rituals but the controlling of the tongue that determines spiritual maturity. Pharisaical religion is false religion. James was reiterating the words of Jesus when he said, "*Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world*" (Jas 1:27). Jesus, denouncing the false religious leaders of Israel, said, "*Woe, unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation*" (Matt 23:14). These have "*a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof*" (2 Tim 3:5). True religion is seen in a faith that works, not a form with words (Jas 2:15-16).

Religiosity—appearing to be good and godly—is not true religion or godliness either. For example, "Hitler knew how to dissemble. One had to look very closely at his terrible book *Mein Kampf* very carefully to see the cloven hoof beneath the angel's luminous robes.

"He made free use of the Christian vocabulary, talked about the blessing of the Almighty ... he rang bells and pulled out all the organ stops. ... He handed out pious stories to the press, especially the church papers. ... he showed his tattered Bible to some deaconesses ... He was able to introduce a pietistic timbre into his voice which caused many religious people to welcome him as a man sent from God. And a skilled propaganda machine saw to it that despite all the atrocities which were already happening and despite the rabid invasions of the Nazis in the churches, the rumor got around that the good Fuhrer knew nothing about these things." (*Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations*)

QUESTION: Does religiosity or being religious mean salvation?

PRAYER: Lord, I do not want to be religious but Christlike in speech and in deed.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 27

JAMES 2:1-4

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8

“Have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ ... with respect of persons?”

DO NOT DISCRIMINATE!

True Faith is manifested by treating everyone, rich or poor, equally but the believers were favouring the rich and despising the poor (Jas 2:1-4).

“My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons” (Jas 2:1). James assumed that the readers were in the faith by addressing them as brothers. By addressing them in such a way, James was in effect attempting to establish his case against them, namely, that of partiality. He was telling them, “If you are truly in the faith, why is it then that there is discrimination among you?” The Present Imperative *echete* with the negative *me* indicates that the problem was already existing. James was in effect commanding them, “Remove right this moment your attitude of discrimination, which is presently evident among you, if you are truly Christian.”

James’s mention of Christ as the Lord of glory is significant. The very fact that God Himself was willing to forsake His glory to save a sinful and unloving people like us reveals His impartiality (Phil 2:5-8). There is no respect of persons with God (2 Chron 19:7, Rom 2:11, Eph 6:9, Col 3:25).

When James mentioned the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, he must be referring to the privileged opportunity he had along with Peter and John in seeing the Lord transfigured before their very eyes. For a moment, they saw the shekinah glory of the living God. John spoke of that marvellous experience in his gospel in John 1:14. Peter gave his testimony concerning the transfiguration in 2 Peter 1:16-17, *“For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*

QUESTION: What kinds of discrimination do I see in the church today?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be good and kind, fair and just to everyone, regardless of who they are.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 28

JAMES 2:1-4

LUKE 16:19-31

*“And are become
judges of evil thoughts.”*

WOO THE RICH, BOO THE POOR

What did James mean when he said that Christians should be impartial? In order to make himself clear, James cited a case for illustration: *“For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool”* (Jas 2:2-3). There is always this tendency of depraved humanity to adore the rich and despise the poor.

“Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?” (Jas 2:4). “Now just for a moment (James is saying in effect), you who have acted in such a way, do you know what you are really guilty of? Are you not distinguishing or dividing in yourselves and become judges of wicked thoughts? That is indeed a great indictment. James returned to the idea of Christians being double-minded or split-souled. As a friend remarked who read the exposition of James 1:6, where the same verb, *diakrinomai*, is used, this is ‘Christian schizophrenia.’ You classify people in your mind, not according to their real spiritual worth, but according to their outward physical appearance. If you are a spiritual being, as you ought to be, you had better go all the way. The faith of Jesus Christ cannot possibly have one standard for the rich and another for the poor. All are saved the same way and all occupy the same position before God. Furthermore, with this indictment James clearly indicated that this outward behavior...has its roots inside, in the heart, in the mind, and it tends to rob one of his blessedness and happiness in Christ. A man should not profess to be a Christian and have worldly standards of judgment at the same time. Let us remember to look at the inner man, first in ourselves and then in others” (Zodhiates).

QUESTION: Why do people (even I) place such emphasis on the outward image?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to see people the way You see them, looking at the heart, not the face.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 29

JAMES 2:5-7

1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-28

“Hath not God chosen the poor?”

MORE POOR THAN RICH

“If we act in such a way, James declares, we have become judges of wicked thoughts. What does this mean? In our mind when we ushered the rich and luxuriously dressed worshiper to the best seat in the assembly, we did so for the sake of expediency. Perhaps one day we might need this rich man for a personal favor. Our favoritism stems from selfishness when we come down to it. That is one of those sins which creeps into our hearts, often quite unconsciously. We are so saturated with self that even our preferential treatment of others has self in the background. Who cares about the poor? We can never expect anything of him. But the rich—we never know when we are going to need him” (Zodhiates).

“Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?” (Jas 2:5). This question introduced by the negative *ouk* expects the answer “Yes.” The phrase “*of this world*” describes in what sense “*the poor*” are poor. They are poor in the eyes of the world. The poor socially (e.g. widows, orphans, physically handicapped, etc; cf. 1:27), intellectually (e.g. slow-learners, under-achievers, those with no diplomas or degrees to show for, etc.), and materially (e.g. beggars, or low earners), are often despised by the world. The rich tend to look down on the poor, and the poor try to hide their low status.

But God is no respecter of persons. He does not discriminate against the poor and pass them by in favour of the rich. On the contrary, we find that the poor in the church far outnumber the rich. (Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-28.)

QUESTION: Why does God favour the poor over the rich?

PRAYER: Lord, I want to be poor in spirit so that I can be rich in Christ.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 30

JAMES 2:5-7

MARK 10:23-30

*“Rich in faith,
and heirs of the kingdom.”*

RICH ARE THE POOR

Jesus Himself commented that the rich will find it extremely difficult, even impossible, to enter the kingdom of heaven on account of their love for wealth, *“how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! 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”* (Mk 10:24-25). It is the poor or the poor in spirit who will enter the kingdom of God (Lk 6:20, Matt 5:3). The evangelists were not referring to physical poverty here but spiritual poverty—total denial of self, and absolute dependence on God for salvation. The poor are more receptive to the gospel because they have been taught a spiritual lesson through their low estate—that the cruel world offers no help; help comes from above. Salvation in this life and the next is sourced in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said, *“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”* (John 10:10).

Though the poor may be poor in goods, but they are rich in faith. The phrase *“rich in faith”* may be translated *“rich on account of faith.”* Although they are poor physically, they are rich spiritually because they have found true riches in Christ. Life in this world is only temporary. It is only for a short time as compared to eternity in the life hereafter. The heavenly joys drown the sorrows of this earthly life. Christians may be beggars now, but they shall be princes in the world to come (Rev 20:6).

*With eternity’s values in view,
Lord,
With eternity’s values in view;
May I do each day’s work for
Jesus,
With eternity’s values in view.*

QUESTION: How does a Christian accumulate riches in heaven?

PRAYER: Lord, let me have only eternity’s values in view.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 31

JAMES 2:5-7

GALATIANS 3:26-29

“Ye have despised the poor.”

HONOUR THE POOR

“But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?” (Jas 2:6-7). There are two rhetorical questions here, both expecting the answer yes. Yes, the rich have been oppressing the poor and blaspheming the name of Christ. In view of the contempt the rich have for those beneath them, James found it strange that the poor and oppressed should imitate the behaviour of the rich, and curry their favour. Calvin commented that through selfish ambition they have “honoured their executioners, and in the meantime injured their own friends.”

It must be understood that “James was not denouncing wealth per se as evil. Neither was he advocating reverse discrimination, whereby the poor are to be favored at the expense of the rich. He was arguing against favoritism of any kind” (Homer Kent). As God is impartial, so must we be (Gal 3:26-29).

“An ancient king made a great feast, and invited a company of poor people who were Christians. He also invited his nobles. When the poor Christians arrived, he had them up into the presence-chamber; but, when the nobles came, he set them in the hall.

“Demanded the reason why, he answered, ‘I do not do this as their king. But, as I am going to another world. I must honour them as God’s dear children, who shall be kings and princes with me hereafter. I would have you esteem them according to their worth—and show it.’”
(*Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations*)

QUESTION: What help can I render to the Christian poor?

PRAYER: Lord, grant me compassion for the poor especially those who belong to You.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 1

JAMES 2:8-11

MATTHEW 22:36-40

“If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture.”

THE ROYAL LAW

“If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors” (Jas 2:8-9). Why is this law of love called the royal law? It is called royal because it is a divine law. It is issued by the King of kings and Lord of lords. Love is such a comprehensive commandment that it fulfills all other laws. The Lord Jesus when asked which is the foremost commandment of the law replied, *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets”* (Matt 22:36-40).

The Ten Commandments (Exo 20) can be summarised by the two-fold commandment of love. The first five commandments address our love for God: (1) Thou shalt have no other gods before me, (2) Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, (3) Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain, (4) Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy, and (5) Honour thy father and thy mother (divine representatives on earth). The second set of five speaks of love towards man: (1) Thou shalt not kill, (2) Thou shalt not commit adultery, (3) Thou shalt not steal, (4) Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour, and (5) Thou shalt not covet. That is why Paul said, *“love is the fulfilling of the law”* (Rom 13:10). And if anyone were to ask, “Who is my neighbour?” we have Jesus’ parable of the good Samaritan for an answer. My neighbour is not just the rich, but also the poor.

QUESTION: Why are we to *“love thy neighbour as thyself”* and not *“more than thyself”*?

PRAYER: Lord, I praise You for Your just and holy laws which show how good and how great You are.

LORD'S DAY, NOVEMBER 2

JAMES 2:8-13

ROMANS 2:12-16

"He is guilty of all."

BREAK ONE BREAK ALL

"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law" (Jas 2:10-11). The Ten Commandments are a unit. A violation of one commandment entails a violation of all. There is no such thing as venial sins (small sins which are permissible, excusable, and pardonable), and mortal sins (big sins which incur the penalty of spiritual death). Every sin whether big or small deserves hell-fire. Even though one has been a model citizen, but at some point in time violates the law, he is considered a criminal; his good record in the past notwithstanding. The readers cannot say that they love God if they love only the rich and not the poor. When they ill-treat the poor, they ill-treat God.

We are to live as people who will be judged by the moral law. *"So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty"* (Jas 2:12). The words *"speak,"* and *"do"* are written in the imperative mood. This is not something that the readers can choose to do or not to do. As Christians, they ought to live according to the duties laid down in the perfect law of liberty. The present tense of both commands indicate the need for a daily, habitual regulation of speech and deed. But it is not enough just to speak good; it is equally important to do good. Profession of faith must be accompanied by the performance of it. Christians should live in the light of the coming judgment. This is not the judgment of the Great White Throne (Rev 20:11), but the Judgment Seat (*Bema*) of Christ (2 Cor 5:10). It is not the judgment of sinners, but of saints who have been released from the bondage of sin to obey the law of liberty (cf. Jas 1:25).

QUESTION: Why must we obey the law since we are in the age of grace?

PRAYER: *"O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day"* (Ps 119:97).

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 3

JAMES 2:8-13

MATTHEW 18:21-35

“Mercy rejoiceth against judgment.”

MERCY AND FORGIVENESS

James did not take for granted that all his readers were born again. So, he issued a warning. *“For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.”* (Jas 2:13). Those who show no mercy to their fellow-men will receive no mercy from God. This is exactly what Jesus taught, *“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy”* (Matt 5:7). *“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses”* (Matt 6:14-15). *“Judge not that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again”* (Matt 7:1-2). Jesus’ parable of the compassionate king and the merciless servant (Matt 18:21-35) illustrates this wonderful truth admirably.

A true believer who has received the grace of God would and should show himself gracious to others. Those who show no mercy to others reveal a Christless heart. Unless they repent of their sins, and allow the grace of God to come into their lives, they will receive no mercy in the coming judgment. And that judgment is the judgment of the Great White Throne where God will condemn sinners to hell. But if a person manifests the fruits of regeneration (being merciful is one of them), there is no need to fear the judgment to come.

QUESTION: Is the justice of God and the mercy of God incompatible?

PRAYER: A Child’s Prayer: “Dear God, make all the bad people good, and make all the good people nice.”

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4

JAMES 2:14-26

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13

“Faith, if it hath not works, is dead.”

WHAT IS DEAD FAITH? (I)

Chapter 2:14-26 is the key passage of the book of James. The relationship between faith and works is clearly explained in this passage. The thesis of the whole epistle is stated in verse 20, *“faith without works is dead.”* As a matter of fact, the words *pistis*, “faith,” and *ergon*, “work,” occur no less than 10 times in these 13 verses.

How do faith and works relate? “James insisted that a living faith will authenticate itself in the production of works. There is no antagonism between faith and works. They are not two totally distinct concepts, but rather two inseparable elements in salvation.”

Although this relationship between faith and works (faith is the root of salvation, and works is the fruit of salvation) is clear enough, not everyone agrees that it should be seen in that light. On the one hand, we have those who advocate that the root of salvation involves faith and works (faith + works = salvation). On the other hand, there are the Antinomians who say that it is only faith that counts, and thus quite alright for one to live as one pleases after salvation (faith = salvation → no works). In between the above heretical views is the orthodox view that genuine faith which brings about salvation will result in a changed life (faith = salvation → good works).

In the time of the Apostles, there were (1) the Judaizers who taught a faith-plus-works salvation, and (2) the Gnostics who taught a salvation that requires faith, but not a changed life. The former was ably refuted by Paul who called it “another gospel” (Gal 1:8), and the latter by James who contended that *“faith without works is dead”* (Jas 2:20, 26).

QUESTION: Are fruits of my faith in Christ seen in my life?

PRAYER: Lord, may my faith in You not be a dead faith, but a fruitful one.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 5

JAMES 2:14-26

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13

“Faith, if it hath not works, is dead.”

WHAT IS DEAD FAITH? (II)

“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?” (Jas 2:14). Apparently, there are those in the Church who profess to believe in Christ, and confidently claim to be saved, but in their lives Christlikeness is not evident. Can *this kind of faith* save him? The answer, of course, is in the negative. James was not denying that faith does indeed save. What James was questioning is not genuine faith, for true faith will bring forth good works, but false faith which is only in word but not in deed. The word *“faith”* in the second interrogative clause has the definite article. The article points back to the faith of the first interrogative sentence—the faith that *“does not have works.”* James was not saying that faith in general does not save. He was saying that *that kind of faith* (i.e. an empty faith) does not save.

Having noted this, it should be pointed out that “James was not arguing for two salvation requirements: faith plus works. He was not saying that some people have only arrived at the halfway point and now must add appropriate works to their faith. Neither was he contradicting Paul, as though Paul taught salvation by faith, and James taught salvation by works.

“What James was contrasting was true faith, which inevitably produces action because it is alive, versus a mere claim to faith, which is profession only and has no life-changing power. Such a claim is spiritually dead; it is powerless to produce any works. It is not a faith that entrusts the soul to God’s provision of grace in Christ” (Homer Kent).

QUESTION: What is false faith? Can I ever tell for sure whether a person has true faith or not?

PRAYER: Lord, search my heart, and help me to examine myself to make sure that my faith in You is genuine and not fake.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 6

JAMES 2:14-26

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13

“Faith, if it hath not works, is dead.”

WHAT IS DEAD FAITH? (III)

“If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?” (Jas 2:15-16). James cited a case to illustrate in practical terms what faith without works is like. A brother or sister comes to you for help, needing food and shelter, and only kind words are given. Are words able to satisfy the hunger and provide warmth to the ones in need? Such is the kind of faith some of the readers had. A faith that pays only lip service. It supplies no action. It is an empty faith. As the cliché goes, “action speaks louder than words.”

“Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (Jas 2:17). The QED of the above analogy is this: *that kind of* (demonstrative use of the definite article) faith, a faith which is not characterised by works—a workless faith—shows itself to be a dead or false faith. A corpse can produce no action. When James said that faith is dead, he was simply saying that anyone who claims to have faith but does not produce good works is actually devoid of it.

The phrase *kath heauten* translated “being alone” in the KJV may be rendered in one of these three ways: (1) By itself. This may be taken to mean that faith *per se* is not enough for salvation. Good works must be *added* to faith if one desires to be saved. Of course, this was not what James was trying to bring across. James was not trying to say that faith is not enough for salvation. He was merely trying to point out what kind of faith saves. The faith that saves is a productive faith. (2) In itself, or (3) according to itself. “In itself” would give the idea of the inward disposition, or essence of faith. “The point would be that such a faith is not only outwardly unproductive but is also inwardly dead. It is not a matter of adding works to such a faith. It is rather the wrong kind of faith” (Homer Kent).

QUESTION: Was James contradicting the doctrine of salvation by faith alone? What reasons can I give to show that he is not?

PRAYER: Lord, how I thank You that Your gift of faith has changed my life.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 7

JAMES 2:14-26

EPHESIANS 2:8-10

*“I will show thee
my faith by my works.”*

FAITH THAT WORKS (I)

It is important to understand that saving faith (*fides salvifica*) consists of these three elements: “(1) *notitia*, knowledge, the actual content of the gospel and the promises of God; (2) *assensus*, assent, by which the intellect acknowledges the truth of *notitia*, apart from any personal trust or saving appropriation of that knowledge; (3) *fiducia*, trust, or *apprehensio fiducialis*, faithful apprehension, which appropriates savingly, by an act of the will, the true knowledge of the promises of God in Christ. Saving faith, therefore cannot be merely intellectual; it must also be volitional” (*Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* by Richard A Muller).

“An old Scotsman operated a little rowboat for transporting passengers. One day a passenger noticed that the good old man had carved on one oar the word “Faith,” and on the other oar the word “Works.” Curiosity led him to ask the meaning of this. The old man shared how he was saved by the grace of God through faith in Christ, and while testifying, he dropped one oar and plied the other called Works, and they just went round in circles. Then he dropped that oar and began to ply the oar called Faith, and the little boat just went around in circles again. After this demonstration the old man picked up Faith and Works, and plying both oars together, sped swiftly over the waters. He then explained to his inquiring passenger, “You see, dead works without faith are useless, and faith without works is dead also, getting you nowhere. But when you have a faith that works, it makes for safety, progress and blessing.” (*Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations*)

QUESTION: How has my life been transformed since the day I believed in Christ?

PRAYER: Lord, I want to live a life that befits the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8

JAMES 2:14-26

ROMANS 6:1-18

*“I will shew thee
my faith by my works.”*

FAITH THAT WORKS (II)

“Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works” (Jas 2:18). An objector from the outside is taking the side of those who profess an empty faith. By way of a paraphrase, this objector was in effect saying, “You have faith but without works, that is alright; faith alone saves, and I have works but it is apart from faith; well, that is acceptable too; work alone saves also.”

James responded to this objector in a twofold way: (1) “Show me your faith without works,” and (2) I will show you my faith out of works.” Consider the literary structure of the text:

You are having faith	and	I am having works
Your faith without works	and	my faith <i>out of works</i>

In other words, to those who say that faith without works saves, James demanded the evidence for such a faith. To those who claim that works without faith saves, James corrected that works find their basis on faith. And to both groups he said that he can show evidence of real faith by his good works. Hiebert has noticed a chiasmic structure in verse 18,

A *your faith*
 B *apart from works*
 B1 *by my works*
A1 *my faith*

“James can start with his works and point to them as proof of something beyond the works. The works prove that he has faith, for without that faith he could not do them.”

QUESTION: What are the evidences of true faith?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to show my faith by my works.

LORD'S DAY, NOVEMBER 9

JAMES 2:14-26

ROMANS 10:9-11

"The devils also believe."

FAITH OF DEVILS

"Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble." (Jas 2:19). True faith is not credal faith, but obedient faith. The Jew may be able to recite the great OT *Shema*: *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD"* (Deut 6:4), but mere mental acknowledgement of the *Shema* is no guarantee of salvation. For even the rebellious angels know of, agree to, and tremble over this fact, but are not saved. It is saying 'yes' but at the same time shaking instead of nodding one's head.

That the demons have no doubts that Jesus is God and that there is but one God is clearly seen in the Lord's encounter with the Gadarene demoniac (Mk 5:1-10, Lk 8:26-33). The evil spirits readily confessed God's existence and omnipotence. But their confession had nothing to do with their rebellious inward disposition. As a matter of fact, the *"faith"* of the demons was more alive than that of so-called Christians who professed faith, for the devils believe and tremble. The word *"tremble"* (*phrissousin*) literally means "to bristle." It conveys the picture of horror that causes the hair to stand on end. Those who professed faith say that they believe but in their lives they show no fear of the Lord, and persist in a sinful lifestyle. Such faith—being dead—can never save. Credal faith involves the (1) *knowing*, and (2) *agreeing* only. But saving faith consists of not only the knowing and agreeing, but also *the willing or believing*. *"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed."* (Rom 10:9-11).

QUESTION: What are the evidences of demonic faith?

PRAYER: Lord, I pray that I may be like Christ and not like the demons.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 10

JAMES 2:14-26

ROMANS 4:1-13

“The devils also believe.”

FATHER OF FAITH

“But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” (Jas 2:20). James was not taking for granted that the readers are already won over by his previous discussion on the relationship of faith and works. He desired to prove his thesis that *“faith without works is dead.”* The question which he has posed may be translated this way, “Do you want convincing?” or “Do you really want clear proof?” James anticipated the opposition’s demand for biblical proof of his doctrine that faith without works is dead. Those who insisted that faith need not be accompanied by works, James accused of being foolishly ignorant (*kene*). He sought to help them understand what is true faith by citing some biblical examples. He began with Abraham (Jas 2:21-24).

Abraham was a very important person in the Old Testament. The Jews look up to him as the father of the Hebrew nation (Isa 51:2, Matt 3:9), and Christians look up to him as their patriarch of faith (Rom 4:12, 16; Gal 3:7-9). What kind of faith did Abraham have? Was it a faith without works, or a faith that works? The question, *“was not Abraham justified by works?”* is rhetorical. It expects the answer “yes.” This should not be taken to mean that Abraham was saved because he worked for it. It must be categorically stated that only faith saves (*sola fide*). Paul, in no uncertain terms, said, *“For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith”* (Rom 1:17). *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Rom 5:1). *“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified”* (Gal 2:16). *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast”* (Eph 2:8-9).

QUESTION: How did Abraham manifest true faith? Study his life.

PRAYER: Lord, I believe Your words, and have no doubts at all that Your words, every one of them, are pure and true.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 11

JAMES 2:14-26

ROMANS 4:2-3

“Was not Abraham ...
justified by works?”

JUSTIFIED BY WORKS?

So what did James mean when he said that Abraham was justified by works? This statement seems to contradict what Paul said in Romans 4:2-3. This apparent conflict with Pauline soteriology has led some to believe that James should not be a part of Holy Writ. This is an unfortunate and erroneous conclusion. Martin Luther, for instance, called it a “book of straw.” He was reluctant to accept it as part of inspired Scripture because he thought that James advocated salvation by works (Jas 2:21-22, 24-25). From a superficial reading, James seemed to be saying something different from Paul.

There is really no difficulty between Paul and James. They were saying the same things albeit from different angles. Paul was responding to the question: “What is it that saves?” And the answer is, “It is faith alone that saves, not works.” On the other hand, James was responding to the question, “What kind of faith saves?” The answer is, “It is not a *knowing-agreeing* faith, but a *knowing-agreeing-willing* faith.”

James’s emphasis on works as a proof of true faith complements rather than contradicts Paul. When Paul talked about works in his epistles, he was speaking of it as a *means of salvation*. Can a sinner be saved by means of good works? The answer is absolutely and positively no (Rom 5:1, Eph 2:8-9). When Paul discussed works, he was speaking of works *before conversion*. Good works do not save. Only Jesus saves. James, on the other hand, was talking about works as a *manifestation of salvation*. Is a professing Christian saved if his life displays no sign of transformation or repentance? This person had better examine his faith, whether it is saving faith or not. Genuine faith will produce good works. A believer who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit will produce the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). When James discussed works, he was referring to works *after conversion*. An empty faith does not save. Only an active, living faith—a faith that works—saves.

QUESTION: What was my life like before conversion? And after?

PRAYER: Lord, keep changing me to be more and more like Christ.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 12

JAMES 2:21-26

GENESIS 15:1-6

*“Was not Abraham ...
justified by works?”*

GOD SAYS IT, THAT SETTLES IT

The kind of faith that is living faith may be observed in the life of Abraham. When commanded by the Lord, he obediently offered up Isaac as sacrifice. It must be said that Abraham was not saved because of this act. Paul told us that he was saved prior to this event. Abraham was saved when he believed in the promise of God when He said, *“Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed”* (Gen 12:1-3). This promise was repeated in Gen 17:6-8, *“And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”*

When Abraham heard these gracious words of God, he believed. Paul commented, *“Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness”* (Rom 4:3, Gal 3:6) which is affirmed by James (Jas 2:23). What does this mean? Paul explained in Romans 4:9-12 that Abraham was saved before circumcision, and in Romans 4:13-22 that he was saved apart from the law. Abraham being *“fully persuaded that, what he had promised (that he will have a son as a centenarian), he was able to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness”* (Rom 4:21-22 cf. Gen 17:17; parenthesis mine). Abraham was saved because he took God at His Word (Heb 11:8-19). *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Rom 10:17).

QUESTION: Was there a time when my faith was tested like Abraham’s?

PRAYER: Lord, I pray for faith that will keep me strong.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 13

JAMES 2:21-26

GENESIS 22:1-18

“Seest thou how faith wrought with his works.”

FAITH AT WORK

Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22:1-18) came after he was saved. By his willingness to offer up Isaac when God told him to do so, Abraham revealed that he had real faith. It was a faith which trusted God in every circumstance—good or bad—no matter what. So when James said that Abraham was *“justified by works. ... how faith wrought with his works”* he was not saying that faith plus works saves. Calvin commented that the word *“justified”* has a twofold meaning, “Paul means by it the gratuitous imputation of righteousness before the tribunal of God; and James, the manifestation of righteousness by the conduct.” Homer Kent explains likewise, “When James observed that Abraham’s faith ‘was working with his works,’ it was obvious that he was not arguing for works alone. In fact, he was reflecting exactly the same understanding as Paul, who wrote about ‘faith working through love’ (Gal 5:6). But neither should it be supposed that faith and works are equal partners in the quest for righteousness. If James were viewed as teaching such equality, he would be in contradiction with Paul, who has taught clearly that faith alone saves (Eph 2:8-9). James’s point was that faith that saves is a faith that yields results. If there are no results, it was not real faith.”

Then how should we understand the clause, *“by works was faith made perfect?”* It seems to imply that faith by itself is insufficient for salvation, that it requires works. The word *eteleiothe*, *“perfect,”* indicates to us that faith has a certain goal in the providence of God. Faith does not need perfection, for since faith is a gift of God, it has to be perfect, without flaw. However faith, the source of salvation, works towards the goal of salvation—which is Christlikeness. Paul expressed the same thought when he said that believers are *“created in Christ Jesus unto good works”* (Eph 2:10). Faith, in and of itself, is the only requirement for salvation. But whether one’s faith is real or not is ascertained by whether it comes to fruition or not.

QUESTION: Where are the fruits of the Spirit manifested in my life?

PRAYER: I want to be a fruitful Christian for You, O Lord.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 14

JAMES 2:25-26

JOSHUA 2:1-24

“Was not Rahab the harlot justified by works.”

FAITH SAVES

The story of Rahab is recorded in Joshua 2. Rahab was not saved by works but by faith. We know this from Joshua 2:9-11 where we have her testimony, *“I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.”*

Rahab had heard of the God of Israel who had powerfully delivered His people out of the hand of Pharaoh, opened up the Red Sea, and given them victory over the transjordanian kings. It is interesting to note that when she spoke of God, she used His covenant name *Yahweh* (Josh 2:9,12). She acknowledged that Jehovah was the one living and true God, and desired His salvation.

Rahab demonstrated her faith in Jehovah by protecting the spies (Heb 11:31). She could have easily betrayed her guests to the king of Jericho and by so doing receive a handsome reward, but she did not. She proved her faith by her works. She honoured the Lord, and the Lord honoured her. Matthew 1:5 lists her as one of those who belonged to the lineage of the Messiah.

Not all human bodies are alive. Some bodies are no more than corpses. The body is there, but there is no life. Bodies that are alive have lungs that are breathing, hearts that are pumping, and brains that are thinking. They are alive and kicking. In the same way, only a faith that is alive justifies. An empty faith is dead. Just like a lifeless body that has no breath, so also is the faith that produces no works.

QUESTION: Why was Rahab's faith so great?

PRAYER: Lord, never let me lose sight of Your power and Your grace when I am in distress.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15

JAMES 3:1-6

MATTHEW 12:36-37

“Be not many masters.”

THE KILLER TONGUE

There is a cliché which goes this way, “A tongue six inches long can kill a man six feet tall.” The power of the tongue to heal or to kill should not be underestimated. One way whereby a man may know whether his faith is genuine or not is to see whether he is able to guard his speech. Jesus warned, *“But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned”* (Matt 12:36-37). The thesis of this chapter is found quite early in the Epistle—in 1:26—where James said, *“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.”* What good is it to merely tell someone who is hungry and cold, “be warmed and filled,” and do nothing about it (Jas 2:16). Words are easy to say, but what really counts are the deeds.

“My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body” (Jas 3:1-2). This section on the tongue is particularly addressed to teachers. James may be addressing a problem in the Church where practically everyone is more concerned for the *position* rather than the *content* of teaching. Young converts were becoming rabbis teaching that since there is freedom in the Christian faith, there is no need to observe the moral law of Moses; faith is enough, there is no need for works (Jas 2:14). There is within most of us this unwholesome desire to teach even when we are unqualified to do so. The sinful self wants to tell others what to do rather than to be told what to do. It is vital that we first be students of the Word before we become teachers. If we do not know our theology thoroughly, we may unwittingly teach heresy. If you are not ready to teach, do not assume the position of teacher.

QUESTION: What are the qualifications of a Bible teacher?

PRAYER: Lord, may I never teach heresy, but the truth.

LORD'S DAY, NOVEMBER 16

JAMES 3:1-6

MATTHEW 7:1-5

*"We shall receive the
greater condemnation."*

**BE CAREFUL HOW YOU
JUDGE (I)**

Calvin understood the term *didaskaloi*, "teachers," from a different angle. His commentary reads, "The common and almost universal interpretation of this passage is, that the Apostle discourages the desire for the office of teaching, and for this reason, because it is dangerous, and exposes one to a heavier judgment, in case he transgresses: and they think that he said, Be not many masters, because there ought to have been some. But I take masters not to be those who performed a public duty in the Church, but such as took upon them the right of passing judgment upon others: for such reprovers sought to be accounted as masters of morals. ...

"And that he forbade them to be many, it was done for this reason, because many everywhere did thrust in themselves; for it is, as it were, an innate disease in mankind to seek reputation by blaming others. And, in this respect, a twofold vice prevails,—though few excel in wisdom, yet all intrude indiscriminately into the office of masters; and then few are influenced by a right feeling, for hyprocrisy and ambition stimulate them, and not a care for the salvation of their brethren. For it is to be observed, that James does not discourage those brotherly admonitions, which the Spirit so often and so much recommends to us, but that immoderate desire to condemn, which proceeds from ambition and pride, when any one exalts himself against his neighbour, slanders, carps, bites, and malignantly seeks for what he may turn to a sinister purpose: for this is usually done when impertinent censors of this kind insolently boast themselves in the work of exposing the vices of others.

"From this outrage and annoyance James recalls us; and he adds a reason, because they who are thus severe towards others shall undergo a heavier judgment: for he imposes a hard law on himself, who tries the words and deeds of others according to the rule of extreme rigour; nor does he deserve pardon, who will pardon none. This truth ought to be carefully observed, that they who are too rigid towards their brethren, provoke against themselves the severity of God."

QUESTION: Does the Bible forbid all kinds of judging?

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to judge righteously.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 17

JAMES 3:1-6

MATTHEW 7:1-5

“We shall receive the greater condemnation”

BE CAREFUL HOW YOU JUDGE (II)

The warning is this: those who judge others can expect to be judged more severely by God, and those who condemn must be prepared to receive greater condemnation. So be careful how you judge, and do not be quick to condemn. Jesus Himself warned, *“Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye”* (Matt 7:1-5).

We ought not to be quick to judge or condemn others because we are not sinlessly perfect. All of us (not just teachers in particular, but Christians in general) often stumble in sin. We do not have all knowledge, and are not morally pure. Our judgments are prone to error. But this does not mean that no judgments whatsoever may be made. James was trying to prevent hasty and groundless judgments. Judgments ought to be left to spiritually mature (*teleios*) men who are able to make sound decisions. The word *teleios* translated in the KJV as *“perfect,”* means morally perfect, genuine, physically perfect, complete, mature, adult, initiated. Here, it has the idea of spiritual maturity, i.e. pertaining to being mature in one’s spiritual and ethical conduct. In other words, James was trying to say that if a man is able to control his tongue, he is a spiritually mature person, no longer a babe in Christ. In his speech, he knows when to say what has to be said, and how to say it. The tongue does not control him, he controls the tongue.

QUESTION: How can a person tell if he is judging hypocritically or self-righteously?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to examine myself before I examine others.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 18

JAMES 3:1-6

ECCLESIASTES 5:6

*“A little member,
and boasteth great things”*

TINY BUT POTENT (I)

To illustrate the fact that the tongue is such a powerful instrument, James compares the tongue with (1) the bit that bridles the horse (Jas 3:3), (2) the rudder that steers the ship (Jas 3:4), and (3) a spark that lights up a log (Jas 3:5). In the first two cases, the comparison has to do with the remarkable ability of tiny parts to control huge vessels. The bit and rudder determine the movement of the horse and ship respectively. In like manner, the tongue is a very small part of the body, yet it exercises such great influence on the whole man, and his life. There is therefore a need to control the tongue so as to ensure its proper use.

The third illustration of how a little fire can light up a great log seeks to point out the destructive nature of the tongue. *“And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell”* (Jas 3:6).

What is *“the world of wickedness”*? Matthew Henry comments, “There is such an abundance of sin in the tongue, that it may be called *a world of iniquity*. How many defilements does it occasion! How many and dreadful flames does it kindle! So is *the tongue among the members, that it defileth the whole body*. Observe from hence, There is a great pollution and defilement in sins of the tongue. Defiling passions are kindled, vented, and cherished by this unruly member. And the whole body is often drawn into sin and guilt by the tongue. Therefore Solomon says, *Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin*, Eccles v.6. The snares which men are sometimes led by the tongue, are insufferable to themselves, and destructive to others. It *setteth on fire the course of nature*.”

QUESTION: Examine my tongue. Do I talk too much?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to control my tongue.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 19

JAMES 3:1-6

ISAIAH 14:13-14

*“A little member,
and boasteth great things.”*

TINY BUT POTENT (II)

Matthew Henry continues, “The affairs of mankind and of societies are often thrown into confusion, and all is on a flame, by the tongues of men. ... And it is set on fire of hell. Observe from hence, Hell has more to do in promoting the fire of the tongue than men are generally aware of. It is from some diabolical temptations, and to serve some diabolical designs, that men’s tongues are inflamed. The devil is expressly called a *liar*, a *murderer*, an *accuser of the brethren*; and whenever men’s tongues are employed any of these ways, they are set on *fire of hell*. The Holy Ghost indeed once descended in *cloven tongues as of fire*, Acts ii. And where the tongue is thus guided and wrought upon by a fire from heaven, there it kindleth good thoughts, holy affections, and ardent devotions. But when it is set on fire of hell, as in all undue heats it is, there it is mischievous; producing rage and hatred, and those things which serve the purposes and designs of the devil.”

How did the devil fall into sin and damnation? It was by his proud words as recorded in Isaiah 14:13-14. Note his five “I will”s, “*I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.*” Because of these rebellious words, God cursed him, “*Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit*” (Isa 14:15).

*O be careful little mouth what you
say*

*O be careful little mouth what you
say*

*There’s a Father up above
And He’s looking down in love
So, be careful little mouth what
you say*

QUESTION: Listen when I speak.
Do I talk a lot about myself?

PRAYER: Lord, make my tongue to
be humble and not boastful.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20

JAMES 3:7-12

MATTHEW 23:1-14

*“But the tongue
can no man tame.”*

THE WILD, WILD TONGUE

“For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind” (Jas 3:7). If you visit the Singapore zoological gardens, there are special animal shows where you will be entertained by trained animals—sea lions, elephants, orang utans, and powerful birds of prey like the eagles. Although man can tame such wild creatures, man cannot tame his tongue. The word *damazo* means “to reduce to stillness or quietness.” It is only used one other time in Mark 5:4 with reference to the subjugation of a demon-possessed man. It has the idea of putting someone or something under subjection by way of intense physical pressure or exertion.

“But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (Jas 3:8). Man is able to tame all kinds of wild animals, but the wildness of his own tongue, he is utterly helpless. The qualifier “*no man*” indicates that the subjugation of the tongue is *humanly* impossible. If the tongue is to be controlled, there needs to be *divine* intervention. Only God can do it. And if man is ever going to control his speech, he needs God to help him. How can the tongue be stopped except by God when it is such a destructive and poisonous organ. It does not rest in doing harm, and when it strikes the injury inflicted is often fatal.

QUESTION: Why is the tongue so wild and uncontrollable?

PRAYER: Lord, tame my tongue by Your Spirit.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 21

JAMES 3:7-12

MATTHEW 7:13-20

*“At the same place
sweet water and bitter?”*

THE HYPOCRITICAL TONGUE

“Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be” (Jas 3:9-10). Such double talk or double walk is pharisaical. Jesus warned his disciples, *“All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not”* (Matt 23:3). The Lord cursed the Pharisees because their walk did not match their talk, *“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation”* (Matt 23:14).

“Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh” (Jas 3:11-12). These are rhetorical questions expecting a strong negative answer – *“indeed not.”* James’s argument by analogy here is really a restatement of Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:17, *“Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”*

Neither can one find fresh water in the Dead Sea. Nothing lives in the Dead Sea. This is because the water is extremely dense containing about 25% of solid matter. The Dead Sea receives from the Jordan and other tributaries, but has no outlet whatsoever. Evaporation takes away the water but the solids are left behind causing it to be increasingly saturated with minerals. Rather than salty, the water tastes bitter. It is undrinkable and incapable of sustaining life. As much as one cannot find fresh water in the Dead Sea, one would find it hard-pressed to find good works out of a dead faith.

QUESTION: What are the hypocrisies that I see today?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to walk my talk.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 22

JAMES 3:13-18

PROVERBS 1:1-7

*“Who is the wise man
and endued with knowledge?”*

WHO IS THE WISE MAN?

James has already mentioned the need for divine wisdom in Christian conduct in James 1:5, *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”* In this passage, he elaborates on what this wisdom from above is all about.

“Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom” (Jas 3:13). James is giving further reasons why we should not be quick to teach, or according to Calvin, to judge. A teacher or a judge must not only be armed with information (knowledge), he must also be endued with understanding (wisdom). There needs to be a combination of *gnosis* and *sophia*, the *what* and the *how*, the *theory* and the *praxis*. A good teacher does not only impart facts, he also explains how the student should correctly apply the things learned. A qualified judge will not be quick to pass sentence, but will examine and assess the situation thoroughly before he gives his verdict. A truly wise man will *“be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath”* (Jas 1:19).

True wisdom involves the humble reception and correct application of God’s Word. *“A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels. ... The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge/wisdom”* (Prov 1:5,7, 9:10). And what is the fear of the Lord? *“The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate”* (Prov 8:13).

QUESTION: Can philosophy make me wise?

PRAYER: Lord, give me wisdom that comes from above, and found in Your Word.

LORD'S DAY, NOVEMBER 23

JAMES 3:13-18

JOHN 8:1-11

"With meekness of wisdom."

KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM

Knowledge (*epistemon*) is used together with wisdom (*sophos*). The two terms are synonymous, but wisdom denotes a moral quality and knowledge an intellectual. The call is for an individual not only to possess academic learning but also practical and spiritual insight.

If anyone claims to have such wisdom, let him not just say it, but show it. Wisdom is not only measured by words, but by works. A wise man will most definitely lead a morally good life. Proverbs 3:19-23 speaks of an intrinsic connection between wisdom and conduct, *"The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew. My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion: So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck. Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble."*

Wisdom is seen by kind words and gentle actions. A truly wise teacher or judge will not be proud or arrogant, but humble and courteous to others. He will not flaunt his knowledge or make others look stupid. When others have erred in their ways, he is not judgmental but instructive. Such wisdom may be seen in how the Lord Jesus Christ dealt with the woman taken in adultery (John 8:1-11). The Pharisees displayed a self-righteous attitude and was quick to condemn the woman for her sin. They were out to destroy this woman. Although a sin has been committed, Jesus did not seek to destroy but to heal. And when He had put to silence the accusations of the Pharisees, He asked the woman, *"Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more."* Jesus manifested *"the meekness of wisdom"* spoken of by James (v 13).

QUESTION: Can wisdom do without knowledge and vice versa?

PRAYER: Lord, grant me knowledge and the wisdom to apply knowledge correctly and effectively.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 24

JAMES 3:13-18

1 CORINTHIANS 1:11-2:8

*“This wisdom descendeth
not from above.”*

WISDOM FROM HELL

False wisdom shows itself in the following ways:

(1) The Greek for “*bitter envying*”, *zelon pikron*, speaks of blind and harsh zeal. Zeal is good. There is nothing wrong with it. The Bible encourages us to be zealous (John 2:17, Rom 10:2, 2 Cor 7:7, 9:2, Phil 3:6). But zeal wrongly applied becomes bad. Zeal can become blind fanaticism, bitter strife, or jealousy which arises because of personal pride which is far from the truth.

(2) The Greek for “*strife*”, *eritheian*, is used a total of seven times in the NT and always negatively. It has been translated in the KJV as “*contention*,” or “*strife*” (Rom 2:8, 2 Cor 12:20, Gal 5:20, Phil 1:16, 2:3, Jas 3:14,16). It is “*selfish ambition*.” This word has been used in ancient Greek literature to depict “*a self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means*.” It speaks of an intense desire to grab power, or become popular by speaking evil of others unjustly. This person boastfully and aggressively imposes himself on others, and does things which are contrary to the Word of God. A person with such ambition schemes to put others down so that he can become number one.

This kind of wisdom is not heavenly, spiritual, or godly, but “*earthly, sensual, devilish*.” It is energised and motivated by “*the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*” (1 John 2:16). The wisdom of the world causes “*confusion and every evil work*.” This is clearly seen in the Corinthian Church where worldly wisdom had caused it to be divided into several factions, each of them jockeying for power (1 Cor 1:11-2:8).

QUESTION: How can I prevent myself from being influenced by the world’s wisdom?

PRAYER: Lord, grant me great discernment from Your Word so that I might be able to differentiate between heavenly wisdom and worldly wisdom.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 25

JAMES 3:13-18

GALATIANS 5:19-24

*“This wisdom descendeth
not from above.”*

HEAVENLY WISDOM

“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (Jas 3:17). If there is one word to describe divine wisdom, it is this: pure. The word “*pure*” here is the Greek *hagne* which describes persons or things that are “without moral defect or blemish and hence pure.” In 1 John 3:3, this adjective is applied to God Himself. Since God is pure, the gift of wisdom that comes from Him must also be pure. If we possess His wisdom, we should also necessarily possess His purity.

The word “*pure*” contains an ethical emphasis and refers to the inner quality of a Christian which keeps him from being stained by the impurities of the world. It is a wisdom which produces righteous behaviour. This inward purity begets 7 outward qualities, namely, (1) *eirenike*, “peace loving;” (2) *epieikes*, “unassertive;” (3) *eupeithes*, “ready to obey,” “willing to yield;” (4) *meste eleous*, “practical mercy;” (5) *karpon agapon*, “bears good fruit;” (6) *adiakritos*, “without discrimination;” and (7) *anupokritos*, “without hypocrisy.” The list is by no means exhaustive.

Unlike worldly wisdom which breeds all kinds of evil works, divine wisdom produces only good works. *“And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace”* (Jas 3:18). The word “*righteousness*” here is connected to the word “*fruit*.” The phrase “*fruit of righteousness*” speaks of the fruit that is produced by righteousness. James said, *“the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God”* (Jas 1:20). If righteousness does not produce wrath, then what does it produce? Well, it produces peace; the righteousness of God produces the fruit of peace in man.

QUESTION: How does a believer obtain heavenly wisdom?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to fear You and walk close to You.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 26

JAMES 4:1-6

TITUS 3:1-3

*“Your lusts that war
in your members.”*

WORLDLINESS PRODUCES GREED

The Apostle James continued to describe the destructive fruit of earthly-sensual-devilish wisdom which is basically self-seeking and self-indulgent. In this chapter, James further described the (1) lust of the flesh (Jas 4:1), (2) lust of the eyes (Jas 4:4), and (3) pride of life (Jas 4:5-6) that characterise worldly wisdom.

“From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?” (Jas 4:1). James was speaking of fightings within the Church. Two words “wars” and “fightings” are used to describe the conflicts that are found in the Church, (1) *Polemoi*—where we get the English word, “polemics”—which means “wars,” and (2) *machai*—which is a more specific term than *polemos*—meaning “all kinds of battles” in the plural (cf. Tit 3:9, 1 Tim 6:4). There existed a polemical, belligerent spirit in the Church which resulted in many verbal and perhaps physical clashes.

These fightings are external manifestations of an internal problem. The problem lies with the depraved heart which incessantly seeks to please its carnal lusts. The word for “pleasures” here is the Greek *hedonon* where the term “hedonism” is derived. Hedonism is “the doctrine that pleasure is the highest good” (Chambers). If by killing someone you derive pleasure, then killing is good. *Hedone* is used five times in the New Testament and all speak of evil desire (Lk 8:14, Tit 3:3, Jas 4:3, 2 Pet 2:13). The sinful pleasures “range from unrestrained sexuality through all the symptoms of lack of self-discipline to a self-centred indifference to one’s fellow-man” (E Beyreuther).

QUESTION: What are the characteristics or manifestations of materialism?

PRAYER: Lord, I want to please You, not the pleasures of this world.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 27

JAMES 4:1-6

MATTHEW 7:7-11

“Because ye ask amiss.”

SINFUL PRAYERS

What is gained from a hedonistic lifestyle? Nothing! *“Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts”* (Jas 4:2-3). Covetousness does not bring satisfaction. A man who covets will not cease to want more. The more he gets, the more he wants. That is why he will never come to a point where he is said to have enough. Murder is often a product of covetousness. This may be seen in the case of David who coveted Bathsheba, and in an attempt to hide his adulterous affair, he murdered her husband Uriah (2 Sam 11).

The Lord has encouraged His children to pray. He has promised to hear and answer their prayers. Jesus said, *“Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth: and to him that knocketh it shall be opened”* (Matt 7:7-8). *“If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it”* (John 14:14). There are times we do not receive what we need because we did not pray. Instead of trusting in God to provide, we seek to obtain by sinful means—stealing, cheating, etc. Although Jesus promised to answer our prayers, it ought to be noted that Jesus was not offering a blank cheque.

There are certain qualifications in prayer. James tells us that we ask and do not receive because we ask amiss. What does *“amiss”* mean? The word translated *“amiss”* (*kakos*) literally means “badly.” This word has a moral connotation. Asking amiss is to ask with sinful motives, or to ask for things which are morally wrong. When Jesus promised to answer all our prayers, He also said that we should pray in His name (John 14:14). Only prayers that are made in Christ’s name are answered. Such prayers are not selfish, they proceed from faith, are made in accordance with God’s will— *“Not our will, but thy will be done”* to the glory of God the Father (John 14:13)

QUESTION: When I pray with full faith, does it mean that I will surely get what I asked for?

PRAYER: Lord, I pray for Your will to be done in my life always.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 28

JAMES 4:1-6

2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-7:1

*“A friend of the world
is the enemy of God.”*

SPIRITUAL ADULTERY

Jesus said that God will only give us that which is good (Matt 7:11). The word “good” is *agathos*; it “describes that which, being good in its character or constitution, is beneficial in its effect” (W E Vine). In other words, God’s gifts are not only morally good, they will also bring about good results. He will not give us things that will cause us to sin, that will do us physical and spiritual harm. He will not give us money to spend on lustful pleasures.

“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (Jas 4:4). The adultery that is spoken of here does not refer to marital infidelity but to spiritual infidelity or spiritual adultery. Christ is the Bridegroom (Matt 9:15), and the Church is His bride (2 Cor 11:2). Adultery is committed when the Church has an affair with the world. This is a case of the unequal yoke. The Lord has commanded, *“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God”* (2 Cor 6:14-16). We can only have one husband, and one master. Jesus said, *“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon”* (Matt 6:24).

Whoever befriends the world makes God his enemy. The word *kosmos* here refers to the present sin-cursed world and godless worldview which stand opposed to the kingdom of Christ. Whoever becomes a friend of the world, becomes a friend of the devil since Satan is the prince of this world (John 14:30). He who succumbs to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:15) is no friend of God

QUESTION: What are the characteristics of worldliness?

PRAYER: I love Your kingdom Lord. May Your kingdom come soon!

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 29

JAMES 4:1-6

2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-7:1

*“A friend of the world
is the enemy of God.”*

CURE FOR WORLDLINESS

“Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” (Jas 4:5-6). The human spirit is evil and plagued with envy and strife. “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom 3:10-18).

God gives grace to overcome sin, but it is given only to those who would humble themselves before God and acknowledge their utter helplessness to overcome sin, the world, and Satan. God cannot help those who would not want His help. Psalm 138:6 says, *“Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off.”*

*He giveth more grace when the
burden grows greater;
He sendeth more strength when
the labours increase.
To added affliction He addeth His
mercy;
To multiplied trials, His
multiplied peace.
His love has no limit, His grace
has no measure;
His pow’r has no boundary
known unto men.
For out of His infinite riches in
Jesus,
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth
again!*

—A J Flint

QUESTION: Is there such a thing as “pride of humility”?

PRAYER: Lord, I pray for humility inside out.

LORD'S DAY, NOVEMBER 30

JAMES 4:7-10

EPHESIANS 6:10-18

*"Submit yourselves
therefore to God."*

SUBMISSION TO GOD

"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded" (Jas 4:7-8). A chiasm may be found in verses 6-7:

God (Divine Example)

A resists the proud
(Negative)

B gives grace to the
humble (Positive)

You (Human Response)

B1 submit to God (Positive)

A1 resist the devil
(Negative)

(1) Observation: Divine/Human responses: (a) Divine: negatively, resisting the proud; positively, giving grace to the humble. (b) Human: positively, submitting to God; negatively, resisting the devil.

(2) Implication: Divine sovereignty/Human responsibility: (a) God resists the proud because pride is of the devil, and man should follow His example by doing likewise. (b) God promises to give grace to the humble, and man receives it when he submits to God.

The word "*submit*" (*hupotagete*) literally means "put under." It means more than "obey." It involves "the surrender of the will to the leadership of another" (Homer Kent). As stated before, true faith consists of not just the *notitia* and *assensus*, but also *fiducia*—surrender of one's will to the leadership of Christ.

The word "*resist*" (*antistete*) means "stand against." It is not an offensive but defensive word. The Christian is not told to be the aggressor or to initiate a confrontation with and overtly declare war against the devil (read Jude 8-10). The devil will do the attacking. We are told to defend ourselves by putting on the whole armour of God (Eph 6:11).

QUESTION: What are the practical ways in which I can submit to God?

PRAYER: Lord, I will obey and follow You no matter what.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 1

JAMES 4:7-10

2 CORINTHIANS 7:8-12

“Let your laughter be turned to mourning.”

HUMILITY AND SORROW

A two-fold injunction and promise is issued here in James 4:7-8: (1) Resist devil, devil flees; (2) submit to God, God draws near. There are no two ways about it. A two-fold warning is equally valid: (1) Submit to devil, devil draws near; (2) resist God, God departs. It is either absolute loyalty to Satan or absolute loyalty to Jesus. Light and darkness like oil and water do not mix. There is no blessing for double-mindedness. This brings us back to 1:6-10 where James said that the double-minded man is unstable and can expect to receive nothing from the Lord.

“Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (Jas 4:9-10). The prevailing adulterous affair that the Church is having with the world is no cause for joy but grief. It is abnormal for a Christian to feel good when sin is committed. They ought to be utterly miserable (*talaiporeo*). There should be tears of repentance. *“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation”* (2 Cor 7:10). Sin is not to be presumptuously laughed off, but mournfully confessed before God (Matt 5:4; 1 John 1:9).

Calvin said, “... the grace of God will then be ready to raise us up, when he sees that our proud spirits are laid aside. We emulate and envy, because we desire to be eminent. This is a way wholly unreasonable, for it is God’s peculiar work to raise up the lowly, and especially those who willingly humble themselves. Whosoever, than, seeks a firm elevation, let him be cast down under a sense of his own infirmity, and think humbly of himself. Augustine well observes somewhere, As a tree must strike deep roots downwards, that it may grow upwards, so every one who has not his soul fixed deep in humility, exalts himself to his own ruin.”

QUESTION: What are the signs of false sorrow and repentance?

PRAYER: Lord, search my heart and know my thoughts, prove me and make me pure within.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2

JAMES 4:11-12

MATTHEW 5:43-48

“Speak not evil one of another.”

BAD MOUTH OTHERS NOT

“Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?” (Jas 4:11-12). James came back to the subject of the tongue—our speech. There are frequent quarreling in the Church. The unholy desire to be on top has led to false accusations being leveled against one another. Many in the Church have adopted a judgmental spirit (Jas 3:1). They have been cursing one another (Jas 3:10). There is bitter envying and strife in the Church (Jas 3:14). This critical spirit is destructive and has to stop. The word *katalaleo* literally “to speak against” is used three times here, and in all three times it is written in the present tense. The present tense denotes continual action. They have been *continually* speaking evil of one another. So the command here may be translated, “Stop right this moment your habitual act of speaking ill of one another.”

By speaking evil of one’s brother, one is really going against God’s law, namely, the law of love. They have been cursing one another for no reason other than to promote themselves. It was taught by Jewish theologians that a man should “*love his neighbour, and hate his enemy*” (Matt 5:43). God never taught His people to hate their enemies. Exodus 23:4 says, “*If thou meet thine enemy’s ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again.*” Proverbs 24:17 states, “*Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth.*” God tells His people to love their enemies. Jesus commanded, “*Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you*” (Matt 5:44). If they are to love their enemies who are outside the faith, how much more they should love their own brothers in the faith.

QUESTION: Is it always wrong to pass judgments?

PRAYER: Lord, help me always to judge myself first before I judge others.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3

JAMES 4:11-12

REVELATION 12:9-11

*“Who art thou
that judgest another?”*

LET GOD JUDGE

What did James mean when he said that the people have become judges of the law (Jas 4:11b)? It simply means that in justifying their habitual conduct of verbally abusing one another, they are in effect saying that the law is wrong. They have become judges of the law by interpreting the law in ways that would be convenient to them. The law of God becomes relative to them, rather than absolute.

There is only one Judge of the law, even the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who issued it. It is He who will judge (1) saints at the Judgment Seat (*Bema*) for their works (2 Cor 5:10), and (2) reprobates at the Judgment of the Great White Throne for their sin (Rev 20:11). However, the doers of the law are many. Those who set themselves up as judges, are usurping a position that belongs only to God. This censorious spirit is of the devil for he is said to be an accuser of the brethren (Rev 12:10).

“It must be understood, however, that James was not intending to prohibit believers from making any kind of moral judgments regarding each other. James himself has evaluated some instances of faulty conduct and called the perpetrators ‘sinners’ (4:8). Even more severely does he castigate certain rich men (5:1-3). Scripture actually commands believers to evaluate the conduct of others and take appropriate action. Jesus told His followers not to treat spiritual truth carelessly by casting their ‘pearls before swine’ (Matt. 7:6). Paul told the Corinthian Christians to judge sinfulness in their midst and excommunicate offenders (1 Cor 5:1-5). They were to reject association with so-called brothers who persisted in immoral living (1 Cor 5:11). John instructed his readers to put visiting teachers to the test and make appropriate decisions about them (1 John 4:1). Teachers of falsehood were to be refused any kind of welcome or support (2 John 10-11). What James was therefore prohibiting was a judgmental spirit that usurped authority belonging to God” (Homer Kent).

QUESTION: What are the characteristics of a judgmental spirit?

PRAYER: Lord, may I never play God by condemning others and being vengeful.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4

JAMES 4:13-17

LUKE 12:16-21

“For what is your life?”

PRIDEFUL PRESUMPTION

One of the ways whereby the readers have befriended the world and made the Lord their enemy was their total disregard for God in their business decisions and engagements. “These energetic Jewish traders have precisely scheduled their travel plans (“today and tomorrow”), the exact location of their enterprise (“such and such a city”—can you not visualize a finger pointing it out on the map?), the duration of this intended operation (“spend a year there”), the precise nature of their activity (“engage in business” [KJV, “buy and sell”]), and the anticipated outcome (“make a profit”)” (Homer Kent).

Such diligent and meticulous planning is not wrong in itself. It is wrong when we do not take God into consideration. Questions like, “Does the Lord want us to go here?”, “Will He be pleased if we do this?”, “What can we do to extend the kingdom of God in our business trips?,” were never asked. Making money is the number one priority. Many a time we keep our faith away from our business. Such presumptuous businessmen think that their lives are in their hands. They should realise that they subsist and are able to engage in such ventures because God has graciously allowed them to. For our life is like a vapour or mist. As much as we are not able to control the amount of time a vapour will last, neither can we determine how long we live. If we continue to live our lives without due regard for God and His Word, He may cut short our time here on earth. There is a lesson in Jesus’ parable of the rich fool. To the rich *towkay* who told himself to enjoy life, and take it easy, God said, “*Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasures for himself, and is not rich toward God*” (Lk 12:20-21).

QUESTION: Is it sinful to be rich? Can one be rich and yet godly?

PRAYER: Lord, I want to be a good steward of the possessions that You have given me, to use them for You and Your kingdom.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5

JAMES 4:13-17

PROVERBS 3:5-6

“If the Lord will.”

GOD ALWAYS FIRST

In life, we should always do this: *“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you”* (Matt 6:33). By seeking God first, we should never say, “May my will be done,” but *“If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that”* (Jas 4:15). Instead of arrogantly saying, “I will do this,” or “I will do that,” Christians should always seek the will of God, and humbly include the words, “The Lord willing.”

This ought to be so not only when planning for business trips, but also for holiday and even more so missions trips. This may be seen in the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul. Paul told the Ephesians that “if God will” he will pay them a second visit (Acts 18:21). He said the same to the Corinthians (1 Cor 4:19, 16:7), and to the Philippians (Phil 2:19).

“But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil” (Jas 4:16). There are business executives who show off their five-year or ten-year plans. Some Christians are impressed by such godless planning, and adopt such worldly methods for the Church. It ought always to be remembered that “Man proposes, but God disposes.” Our planning must never be independent of God, and should be short term ones. We must never go ahead of God. As God opens the door, we enter. And God opens doors one at a time. He leads us a step at a time. This causes us to be ever dependent on Him for guidance each step of the way. That is why God does not reveal to us the exact time of His coming. He wants us to be mindful that He may come any time, hence, we have to be prepared all the time (Matt 24:30,42, 25:13). Sinful man is such that if he had known the exact moment of Christ’s return, he would plan to live according to his pleasure till it is five minutes to midnight!

QUESTION: How can I ascertain the will of God in my life?

PRAYER: Lord, show me Your will and Your way so that I might live rightly for You.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6

JAMES 4:13-17

ROMANS 3:9-23

“To him it is sin.”

OMIT OR COMMIT, IT IS SIN

In verse 17, the word “good” (*kalon*) speaks of that which is morally excellent and praiseworthy. The word “do” (*poiein*) is written in the present tense indicating that good is something to be done continually. As the Rev Dr Timothy Tow says, we ought to “do something good for Jesus every day.” Not once in a while, but all the time.

A person may sin in two basic ways: by (1) violating, or (2) ignoring the Word of God. Both types of sin—commission and omission—are equally wrong. James here issued a warning. If they refuse to do that which is good—to heed his words—they have shown contempt for the Word of God. Having heard the Word of God, we must do the Word of God.

“In the days when there were fewer cameras and fewer photographs, and when it was an event in one’s life to have one’s photo taken, an evangelist with a party of friends was enjoying a pleasant Saturday afternoon in Rouken Glen, Glasgow, Scotland, on a lovely summer day. He carried with him a little leather case containing his Bible and, as he walked along, a company of young people out for an afternoon’s enjoyment approached him and said, ‘Please will you take our photograph,’ thinking that the little leather case contained a vest-pocket Kodak.

“Without a moment’s hesitation the evangelist said, ‘O, I have it already.’ The spokesman of the party asked in surprise, ‘When did you take it? You must have got us on the hop.’ Well, anyway I have it here, and here it is,’ said the preacher as he pulled out his well-worn Bible, opened it at Romans 3, and began to read to them from verse 9 to verse 23, ‘This is God’s photograph of every one of us,’ he said, as he concluded his reading with the words, ‘For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.’” (*A Naismith*)

QUESTION: What are the different sins of omission in my life?

PRAYER: Lord, help me do something good for Jesus every day.

LORD'S DAY, DECEMBER 7

JAMES 5:1-6

1 TIMOTHY 6:6-10

"Your riches are corrupted."

THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL

It is not money that is the root of all evil but *the love of it* (1 Tim 6:10). There is nothing wrong in being rich, but there is everything wrong in trusting in riches. In chapter 5, James is continuing his discussion on worldliness (Jas 4:1-4). He now zeroes in on one very real problem—the worship of money. Adultery against God is committed when one makes money one's god. Instead of seeking "to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever" (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question One), their philosophy of life was to "buy and sell, and get gain" (Jas 4:13). James was compelled to warn them against taking this road of self-destruction.

"Come now the rich ones, weep while howling upon your miseries which are coming upon (you). Your wealth has rotted and your clothes have become moth-eaten, your gold even the silver has been covered with rust and their rust shall be for a testimony against you and it will consume your flesh as fire. You have stored up in the last days. Behold the wages of the workmen who have mowed your fields which have been withheld by you is crying aloud, and the shouts of the reapers have come into the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived in luxury upon the earth and have indulged in pleasure, you have nourished your hearts in the day of slaughter, you have condemned, you have murdered the righteous; he does not oppose you" (Jas 5:1-6, personal translation).

James here spoke to the rich who merely professed Christ, but really did not possess Him. These were first mentioned in 1:10-11 where James said that their wealthy estate was only temporary. They may be rich now in their life on earth, but they will be poor in the life hereafter.

QUESTION: What are the things that money cannot buy?

PRAYER: Lord, I thank You that I am the richest person in the world because I have Jesus, Your beloved Son and my Saviour.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 8

JAMES 5:1-6

LUKE 16:19-31

“Your garments are moth eaten.”

MONEY OR CHRIST?

Jesus painted a gloomy picture for the wealthy in the story of the rich man and Lazarus. James could have had this story in mind when he wrote his words against the rich. Let us study closely that story found in Luke 16:19-31. This is not a parable, but a true story. Tertullian argued that the name “Lazarus” is proof that the narrative is not a parable but history. Calvin likewise concluded, “because He mentions Lazarus by name. I judge that he is telling a true story.”

The story of the rich man and Lazarus is intrinsically tied to the parables of the lost items, and the parable of the unjust steward (Lk 15:1-16:18). It is the climax of Jesus’ teaching concerning wrong attitudes toward possessions (Lk 15), and toward people (Lk 16). The story is particularly directed to the Pharisees for their adverse response to Jesus’ statement that, “*No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other, Ye cannot serve God and mammon*” (Lk 16:13).

Luke informed us that the Pharisees were a covetous lot (Lk 16:14). The Pharisees were worshipping money and not God. They were no doubt indignant of Jesus’ revelation of the true nature of their greedy hearts. It was with the purpose of rebuking the Pharisees for their false piety that Jesus was telling the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The tone of the story is one of warning or threat. Greed is addictive, and destructive.

QUESTION: What is greed and how does it show itself?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be godly and contented.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9

JAMES 5:1-6

LUKE 16:19-31

“Your gold and silver is cankered.”

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS (I)

The theme of the story is two-fold: (1) the sin of covetousness, and (2) the disobedience of the Law.

The story of the rich man and Lazarus is a story against the rich religious leaders of Israel who were (1) not following the OT Scriptures (i.e. the *“Law and the Prophets”* Lk 16:17-18 cf. 16:29,31), and (2) not building up treasures in heaven but material wealth on earth (Lk 16:13-14 cf. 16:19).

The scene on earth introduces two characters. First, the rich man who was well-dressed and well fed. Luke described him as one who *“was clothed in purple and fine linen”* (v.19). In those days, the colour purple signified high rank and nobility. This is because only the very rich or the very powerful were able to afford the purple dye used on expensive clothes. This rich man was totally oblivious to spiritual matters for he was thoroughly obsessed with physical pleasures. William Hendriksen commented, *“He was not just rich. He belonged to that class of people to whom the epithet filthy rich is often applied, and not without reason. His living day by day in dazzling splendor marks him as a show-off, a strutting peacock. He wanted everybody to know that he was rich. He was in love ... with himself.”*

He may be likened to the rich fool of Luke 12:19 who said to himself, *“Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.”* The words of God to the rich fool is relevant to the rich man as well, *“Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided”* (Lk 12:20). The divine warning applies here too, *“So is he that layeth up treasures for himself, and is not rich toward God”* (Lk 12:21).

QUESTION: Does building God’s Kingdom require money?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to give of my substance in order to build Your church.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10

JAMES 5:1-6

LUKE 16:19-31

“Your gold and silver is cankered.”

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS (II)

The second character in this story is the beggar by the name of Lazarus. Jesus said that he was *“laid at his gate, full of sores,”* obviously in great pain and suffering (Lk 16:20). This was an opportunity for the rich man to show some kindness to Lazarus who was lying at the doorsteps of his mansion *“desiring to be fed.”* The word *“desiring”* used here is *epithumeo* which means *“to desire greatly”* or *“to lust.”* It is a very strong word for physical desires. It is often used with reference to sexual lust (Matt 5:28). Here it indicates a tremendous craving for food so that hunger might be satisfied. The word is also written in the present tense. Lazarus is thus described as *continuously* longing for food from the rich man. Lazarus was probably starving to death. Now, the begging was not a momentary affair. Lazarus was there pleading for food daily. The fact that he was lying by the gate implies that he was unable to walk. But all this while the rich man was indifferent to the plight of Lazarus and considered him no better than a dog fit only to feed upon the crumbs which fell off from its master’s table. These crumbs were *“pieces of bread which the guests dipped in the dish, wiped their hands with and then threw under the table”* (Joachim Jeremias). Note that it does not say that Lazarus was actually fed with crumbs. It simply says that Lazarus was hoping to be fed with crumbs. He was in all probability still lying outside at the gate starving to death, with his sores being repeatedly licked by stray dogs.

The beggar died and was found in heaven, and the rich man died and was found in hell. There is a reversal of roles. Lazarus is now enjoying bliss, while the rich man is experiencing torment. Abraham’s words aptly describe the situation. He told the rich man, *“Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented”* (Lk 16:25).

QUESTION: Does being poor or a beggar automatically qualifies one for heaven?

PRAYER: Lord, I pray for a poverty of spirit, a contrite heart to know I am a sinner so that I would always confess Jesus as my Saviour.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11

JAMES 5:1-6

LUKE 16:19-31

"Your gold and silver is cankered."

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS (III)

Lazarus is borne by the angels to Paradise (cf. Lk 23:43). He is said to be in "*Abraham's bosom*." "Just as Abraham is called the father of believers because the covenant of eternal life was entrusted to his care, first to keep faithfully for his own children and then to hand on to all the nations, and all the heirs of the promise are called his children, so those who receive with him the fruit of the same faith are said to be gathered into his bosom after they die. It is a metaphor taken from children returning, as it were, to the bosom of their father when they meet at home in the evening after their day's work. God's children are strangers and pilgrims in the world, and as during their present course they follow the faith of their father Abraham, so when they die they withdraw to that blessed rest where he awaits them" (Calvin). Lazarus is where Abraham is and there is close fellowship between the two. Lazarus who was deprived of eating at the rich man's table is now seated with Abraham at the heavenly banquet.

The rich man, on the other hand, is found in hades. The place of the departed dead. He is described as "*being in torments*" (Lk 16:23). The Greek *basanois* denotes "severe pain associated with torture and torment." He himself confessed, "*I am tormented in this flame*" (Lk 16:24). The place where unregenerate sinners are consigned is throughout Scripture described as a fiery abode (Isa 33:14, 66:24; Matt 3:12, 5:22, 13:40,42,50, 18:8,9, 25:41; Mk 9:43-48; Lk 3:17; Jude 7, Rev 14:10, 20:10,14,15, 21:8). The flames have caused him to be so thirsty that he now assumes the role of a beggar; he begs for Abraham to allow Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool his tongue (Lk 16:24). But this was impossible. Abraham responded by saying that (1) he got what he deserved (Lk 16:25), and (2) there exists "*a great gulf*" which prevented movement either way (Lk 16:26). The word for "*gulf*" here is the Greek *chasma* where the English "chasm" is derived. It is "a deep, unbridgeable valley or trough between two points."

QUESTION: Is there a second chance to be saved after one dies?

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, save me right now before it is too late!

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12

JAMES 5:1-6

LUKE 16:19-31

“Your gold and silver is cankered.”

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS (IV)

At this point, the rich man became very evangelistic. He requested that Lazarus be sent to his father's house because he had 5 brothers who were not believers. The rich man wished his brothers to be converted so that they will not experience the horrors of hell (Lk 16:27-28). But Abraham replied, *“They have Moses and the prophets: let them hear them”* (Lk 16:29). In other words, Abraham was saying that the OT Scriptures is sufficient for men to prevent themselves from ending up in eternal damnation. Moses (Deut 18:15) and the Prophets (Isa 53) have pointed forward to the redemptive work of the Messiah— *“the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29). Furthermore, the Law and the Prophets have instructed that true faith will manifest itself in good works; *“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this. To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world”* (Jas 1:27 cf. Mic 6:8). This no doubt was a direct rebuke against the Pharisees who were not only blind towards their Messiah, but also towards the needs of their fellow men (Matt 23:1-36). If these men will not listen to the Word of God, neither will they be convinced by a miracle of such magnitude as that of a man returning from the dead (Lk 16:31).

The story of the rich man and Lazarus should cause us to reconsider, and reexamine our priorities in life and ministry. In salvation and in service, it is either absolute allegiance to God or not at all. *“Ye cannot serve God and mammon”* (Lk 16:13). This story also teaches us human responsibility. It is not enough just to profess faith. Faith must be expressed in deeds, for *“faith without works is dead”* (Jas 2:20). Micah, the prophet, likewise said, *“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”* (Mic 6:8). It is not enough to hear God's Word, we must also do it.

QUESTION: Have I read through the Bible at least once?

PRAYER: Lord, grant me a great hunger and thirst for Your Word.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13

JAMES 5:7-11

2 PETER 3:1-9

“Be patient.”

LONGSUFFERING AND ENDURANCE

“Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh” (Jas 5:7-8). The word *makrothumeo*, translated “be patient” is used three times in verses 7-8. It should be noted that the “patience” here is different from that of James 1:2-4. In the first chapter James was talking about patience as a result of undergoing trials and testings. The word used there is *hupomone* which is the “capacity to continue to bear up under difficult circumstances.” The word for “patience” in James 5:7 literally means “longsuffering.” It describes “a state of emotional calm in the face of provocation or misfortune and without complaint or irritation.” The same word is used again in verse 10 where it describes the patience of the prophets who endured much persecution and affliction. It has the idea of endurance during times of suffering.

These two words, *makrothumia* and *hupomone*, belong to the same semantic range and may be used interchangeably. However, Zodhiates points out the distinction between the two words here, “‘Longsuffering’ is found to express patience in respect of persons. James has been speaking of injurious persons who have been taking advantage of the poor and the just. The Christian ought to be possessed with long-suffering toward these persons in spite of what they do to him. He should not permit himself to be easily provoked by them or to flare up in anger. ...

“On the other hand, if we turn to the first chapter of James’ epistle, we find that he exhorts us to have ‘patience,’ and there it has to do with things, with circumstances of life, and not with persons. A man is said to be patient who, under a great siege of trials, bears up and does not lose heart or courage.”

QUESTION: What trials have I gone through that has caused me to become a more patient and enduring Christian?

PRAYER: Lord, grant me great longsuffering and endurance so that I can overcome every trial and difficult person in my life.

LORD'S DAY, DECEMBER 14

JAMES 5:7-11

MATTHEW 5:10-12

*"He receive the early
and the latter rain."*

PERSECUTION AND TRIBULATION

In encouraging the afflicted believers to be longsuffering, James used the illustration of a farmer who has to wait patiently for "*the early rain and the latter rain.*" "The 'early rain' normally begins in Palestine in late October or early November, and is anxiously awaited because, being necessary for the germination of the seed, it is the signal for sowing. In the spring the maturing of the grain depends on the 'late rain,' light showers falling in April and May. Without these even heavy winter rains will not prevent the failure of crops" (Ropes). We must patiently endure our difficult sojourn here on earth, constantly trusting in the Lord for grace to carry us through. Saving faith is enduring faith. That is why Jesus said, "*But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved*" (Matt 24:13).

In the time of James, and even today, many Christians undergo tremendous hardship and persecution for the sake of the gospel, especially in countries which are hostile towards Christianity. Many believers worship the Lord underground. Many others are imprisoned for believing in Christ. Under such trying circumstances, "The second coming of the Lord Jesus to take His own unto Himself must have been the greatest hope of the Christian Church" (Zodhiates).

*Faith of our fathers, living still
In spite of dungeon, fire and
sword*

*O how our hearts beat high with
joy*

*When-e'er we hear that glorious
word!*

*Faith of our fathers, holy faith,
We will be true to thee till death!*

—Frederick W Faber

QUESTION: Will I ever deny Christ when my life is threatened?

PRAYER: Lord, grant me the grace never to deny You in the face of death.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 15

JAMES 5:7-11

MATTHEW 5:38-48

*“The judge standeth
before the door.”*

GOD IS JUDGE AND AVENGER

“Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door” (Jas 5:9). The positive command to be longsuffering, is followed by a negative injunction to stop groaning against one another. James tells the Christian to suffer silently the injustices that have been done against him. Although the Christian has been injured unjustly, he is not to judge, nor retaliate against the offender. God has said, *“To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste”* (Deut 32:35).

As they suffer silently, they should not harbour any feelings of bitterness or hatred. Lord Balfour said, “The best thing to give to your enemy is forgiveness; to an opponent, tolerance; to a friend, your heart; to your child, a good example; to a father, deference; to your mother, conduct that will make her proud of you; to yourself, respect; to all men charity.”

The word “*grudge*” here is the Greek *stenazete* which has to do with “a feeling internal and largely unexpressed because of a condition one is suffering from and longs to be free of (Rom 8:23-26)” (Homer Kent). It speaks of grumblings that are not spoken by the mouth, but in the heart. We are commanded here to let all feelings of animosity go and live righteously, and let God take over to plead our cause against our enemies.

QUESTION: Why is it so difficult to let go and let God?

PRAYER: Lord, I want to trust in You 100% to solve all my woes; only let me live a life that is pleasing in Your sight.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16

JAMES 5:7-11

1 KINGS 19:1-7

“An example of suffering affliction.”

BLESSED PERSECUTION

“Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience” (Jas 5:10). James was telling the Christian Jews he was writing to that they were not alone in their sufferings. The prophets who were before them had to go through tremendous hardships as God’s spokesmen. We think of Elijah who had to flee from Jezebel (1 Kgs 19:1-7), Jeremiah—the weeping prophet—who was not only beaten and imprisoned, but also thrown into the sewage hole (Jer 38:6), and not forgetting John the baptizer who was beheaded by Herod to amuse the daughter of Herodias (Lk 9:9). The NT abound with references to the persecution of the OT prophets (Matt 5:12, 21:35-36, 22:6, 23:29-37; Lk 13:33; Acts 7:51-52; Rom 11:3; 1 Thess 2:15; Heb 11:32-38; Rev 16:6, 18:24).

We ought to follow after their steps. They are a pattern for us to follow. *“Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy”* (Jas 5:11). Those who have endured persecution are called happy by the Lord, *“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for their’s is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you”* (Matt 5:10-12).

QUESTION: What kinds of persecutions do Christians face today?

PRAYER: Lord, grant me the grace to endure persecutions and afflictions for the sake of Christ and His righteousness.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17

JAMES 5:7-11

1 KINGS 19:1-7

“An example of suffering affliction.”

WELL DONE, JOB!

Not only the prophets, but consider Job as well. His intense suffering was matched by an equally immense ability to endure. Today, we remember him for this very quality of enduring patience. In the midst of personal calamities which came one after the other he was still able to say, *“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him”* (Job 13:15). When we are able to humble ourselves before God like Job, the Lord promised to give more grace. He *“is full of pity, and of tender mercy.”* *“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it”* (1 Cor 10:13).

“Adoniram Judson, the renowned missionary to Burma, endured untold hardships trying to reach the lost for Christ. For 7 heartbreaking years he suffered hunger and privation. During this time he was thrown into Ava Prison, and for 17 months was subjected to almost incredible mistreatment. As a result, for the rest of his life he carried the ugly marks made by the chains and iron shackles which had cruelly bound him.

“Undaunted, upon his release he asked for permission to enter another province where he might resume preaching the Gospel. The godless ruler indignantly denied his request, saying, ‘My people are not fools enough to listen to anything a missionary might SAY, but I fear they might be impressed by your SCARS and turn to your religion!’” (*Henry G Bosch*)

QUESTION: How does persecution cause the church to grow?

PRAYER: Lord, help me understand our sufferings are allowed by You to cause us to increase in our faith, and to make Your church to grow spiritually and numerically.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18

JAMES 5:12-18

MATTHEW 5:34-37

*“Let your yea be yea,
and your nay, nay.”*

LOATHE THE FALSE OATH

(I)

“But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation” (Jas 5:12). The author has already warned that we ought to be extremely careful how we use our tongue. Here is another prohibition for the tongue, namely, unnecessary or frivolous oath-taking. This is taught by Moses in Leviticus 19:12, *“And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.”* Positively, Deuteronomy 6:13 commands, *“Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.”* The Jewish theologians have, by their subtle interpretations of the law, tried to get around those two negative-positive commands. They argued that the Lord only forbade them to swear by His name, but did not prevent them from swearing by other things. So they made themselves believe that swearing by heaven, or by earth, or by any thing under the sun, freed them from sin and judgment.

Jesus in no uncertain terms spoke against such swearings in Matthew 5:34-37, *“But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven for it is God’s throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.”* When they swear by heaven or earth, they are in fact swearing by the name of God. This is “because the glory of God is everywhere inscribed, and everywhere shines forth: nay, men take the words, heaven and earth, in their oaths, in no other sense and for no other purpose, than if they named God himself; for by thus speaking they only designate the Worker by his works” (Calvin).

QUESTION: What are the occasions that make taking an oath necessary?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be a man of my word and to honour the promises I have made.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19

JAMES 5:12-18

MATTHEW 5:34-37

*“Let your yea be yea,
and your nay, nay.”*

LOATHE THE FALSE OATH (II)

The Westminster Confession of Faith devotes a whole chapter on “Of Lawful Oaths and Vows” (XXII). Here are the first three paragraphs:

- I. A lawful oath is a part of religious worship, wherein, upon just occasion, the person swearing solemnly calleth God to witness what he asserteth, or promiseth, and to judge him according to the truth or falsehood of what he sweareth.
- II. The name of God only is that by which men ought to swear, and therein it is to be used with all holy fear and reverence. Therefore, to swear vainly, or rashly, by that glorious and dreadful Name; or, to swear at all by any other thing, is sinful, and to be abhorred. Yet, as in matters of weight and moment, an oath is warranted by the Word of God, under the new testament as well as under the old; so a lawful oath, being imposed by lawful authority, in such matters, ought to be taken.
- III. Whosoever taketh an oath ought duly to consider the weightiness of so solemn an act, and therein to avouch nothing but what he is fully persuaded is the truth: neither may any man bind himself by oath to anything but what is good and just, and what he believeth so to be, and what he is able and resolved to perform.

Oath-taking in itself is not wrong (e.g. in a law-court or at a wedding) when it is taken seriously with due regard for the name of God. But it must be done sincerely and soberly.

QUESTION: What if a person breaks an oath? Is there forgiveness?

PRAYER: Lord, grant me the grace to keep the oaths I have taken.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20

JAMES 5:12-18

1 TIMOTHY 5:23

*“Let them pray over him,
anointing him with oil.”*

PRAYER AND HEALING (I)

Afflictions in this life come from without (e.g. wars, natural disasters, persecutions, etc) and from within (e.g. sickness, disease, etc). James gave advice for the latter. How may we find help in times of physical illness?

“Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? 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” (Jas 5:13-14). What should the Christian do when he becomes physically ill? The Greek word for “sick” (*asthenei*) has to do with bodily maladies, i.e. “to be sick, and as a result, in a state of weakness, and incapacity.” He should call for the elders (*presbyterous*), referring to the office of a senior church official of the church which he is attending, and the elders will (1) pray for him (it is the Lord, the Physician of physicians, who can heal us), and (2) anoint him with oil in the name of Christ. The word “anoint” here is not the usual *chrío* (the regular term for anointing, where the title “Christ” [“Anointed One”] is derived), but the word *aleipho* which means “to rub.” This word has never been used in the sense of sacred anointing. It has been used with reference to the anointing of the body of Jesus for burial (Mk 16:1), and the use of perfume on the feet of Jesus in the house of the Pharisee (Lk 7:38,46). The word *aleipho* here is better translated “to oil.” What is the purpose of this oiling? It is for medicinal purposes. Olive oil, which is abundant in the Middle East, is often used for such oiling in order to soothe the tired or weak body.

The prayer and the oiling teach divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Although it is God who is the Physician of physicians and He can heal us directly and miraculously in answer to prayers according to His will, yet that does not absolve us from our personal responsibility to see the doctors for medical treatment. More often than not, God uses these secondary agents (i.e. doctors, nurses, medicine, etc) to cure us of our physical sicknesses and infirmities.

QUESTION: What kinds of false healings do I see today?

PRAYER: Lord, bless me with good health and strength to serve You.

LORD'S DAY, DECEMBER 21

JAMES 5:12-18

2 CORINTHIANS 12:12

*"The prayer of faith
shall save the sick."*

PRAYER AND HEALING (II)

In James 5:15-16, James was not promoting faith healing as we understand it today. When James wrote this letter, the sign gift of healing was still available, but only to the Apostles (2 Cor 12:12). Here, James spoke of the prayer by the elders, not Apostles. He thus was not referring to miraculous healing by the hand of the latter, but healing directly from the Lord in response to faith (i.e. seeking God's help in prayer) and duty (i.e. taking the proper medical measures). "Self help with God's help is the best help" (Rev Timothy Tow). The Lord will then by His power heal us physically (sickness cured), and spiritually (sins forgiven).

In verse 16, the first clause reads, "*Confess your faults one to another and pray one for another.*" The verbs "*confess*" and "*pray*" are written in the present imperative. In other words, James was commanding that Christians make a habit of confessing their sins to one another. The reciprocal pronouns *allelois* and *allelon* speak of mutual confessions, and prayers to and for one another. It cannot be used as a proof text for sacerdotal or auricular confession by a member to his priest as found in the Roman Catholic Church. John Calvin has this to say, "Wonderful, indeed, is the folly or the insincerity of the Papists, who strive to build their whispering confession on this passage. For it would be easy to infer from the words of James, that the priests alone ought to confess. For since a mutual, or to speak more plainly, a reciprocal confession is demanded here, no others are bidden to confess their own sins, but those who in their turn are fit to hear the confession of others; but this the priests claim for themselves alone. Then confession is required of them alone. But since their puerilities do not deserve a refutation, let the true and genuine explanation already given be deemed sufficient for us."

QUESTION: Does God empower pastors today with the gifts of healing?

PRAYER: Lord, Your will for my life is always the best whether in sickness or in health.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 22

JAMES 5:12-18

PSALM 66

*“The effectual fervent prayer
of a righteous man.”*

PRAYER GOD ANSWERS

Now, what does the clause *“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”* mean? Calvin says that the prayer of a righteous man (i.e. a Christian) “avails much, because it is effectual.”

“Elijah was a man with the same feelings as us, and he prayed earnestly in order that it might not rain, and it did not rain on the earth three years and six months; and again he prayed, and the heaven gave rain and the earth produced its fruit.” Elijah was a famous prophet in the OT—sometimes known as the “prophet of fire” because he was able to call fire down from heaven—and was popular not only among the Jewish people at that time but also among us today. We love to read the story of his dramatic battle with the 450 prophets of Baal on Carmel in 1 Kings 18. Although mightily used by the Lord, Elijah was plagued with the same frailties of the flesh that we have. This may be seen in the fact that after he had defeated the 450 prophets of Baal he ran for his life non-stop from Carmel to Beersheba when Jezebel threatened him. He slew 450 Baal prophets, but fled from one woman. Yet his prayers were effective because he was a righteous man, i.e. a Christian whose sins have been cleansed and forgiven by the blood of Christ, and who has put on the righteousness of Christ. The Lord only hears and answers the prayers of His children. He will not receive any request from unbelievers.

Psalm 66:18 says, *“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.”* Calvin says, “God does not hear the ungodly; nor is access to God open, except through a good conscience: not that our prayers are founded on our own worthiness, but because the heart must be cleansed by faith before we can present ourselves before God.” The only prayer the Lord will hear from an unbeliever is his prayer for salvation, “Lord, have mercy on me a sinner.”

QUESTION: What are the characteristics of a *“righteous man”*?

PRAYER: Lord, sanctify me and cleanse me from sin so that my prayers will be heard by You.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23

JAMES 5:19-20

PSALM 32

*“If any of you do
err from the truth.”*

TRUTH IS LIFE, ERROR IS DEATH

“Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (Jas 5:19-20). This is an appropriate conclusion to a letter full of practical admonitions and encouragements. The term *“brethren”* here need not necessarily refer to *Christian* brothers. Since it has been addressed primarily to *“the twelve tribes”* (Jas 1:1), namely, Israel, it is possible that James was addressing his *Jewish* brothers. He was very concerned for Jews who claimed to have believed in the Lord but show no evidence of it in their lives. They were still unregenerate, and needed to be told what it means to be a Christian.

Of course, he was also addressing true believers or Christians who may have backslided. The warnings against partiality, evil speaking, worldliness, etc apply to them as well. The salvific results apply to both groups as well. If the unbeliever heeds the words of this epistle, he will be saved from eternal death. *“Faith without works is dead.”* The reverse is equally true, *works without faith is dead* (Jas 1:17-18, 2:5). To those who believe the gospel, the Lord promised to cover all their sins—past, present, future. Psalm 32:1-2 states, *“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.”*

The carnal Christian if he repents of his sinful ways will be saved from physical death. The punitive will of God can involve sickness (Jas 5:15), but also includes death for those who persist in and do not confess their sins (cf 1 Cor 11:30-32). If he repents, his sins will be forgiven, and the punishment will be lifted.

QUESTION: How can a Christian tell truth from error?

PRAYER: Lord, make me to repent quickly of my error and evil ways the moment I am convicted of my sins by Your Word and Your Spirit.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24

JOHN 10:1-10

ROMANS 5:6-10

*“I am come that
they might have life.”*

GOD WANTS US TO LIVE, NOT DIE

My pastor and teacher—the Rev Dr Timothy Tow—shared with me how in his time of physical illness and sufferings he has learned one precious lesson from the Lord, and that is: “The Lord wants us to live, not die.” Indeed, life is what Jesus came to give us for He said in John 10:10, *“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”*

How may we find life and not death? We find life when we follow the Good Shepherd and not the hireling. In John 10:11, Jesus said, *“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”* Romans 5:6-10 tells us, *“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”* Jesus saved us by living a sinless life on earth, by dying for our sins on the cross, by being buried in the rock tomb, and by rising again the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:1-4). That was why Jesus was able to say in John 10:17-18, *“Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”* Jesus has the power over life and death. He has the power to lay down His life and be crucified for our sins, and He has the power to live again by His resurrection to gain eternal life for us.

QUESTION: What in practical terms is the abundant life?

PRAYER: Lord, I thank You for life here and now, and life forever more in Christ.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25

JOHN 10:11-16

PHILIPPIANS 3:17-21

*“He is an hireling,
and careth not for the sheep.”*

THE HIRELING

Have we followed the Good Shepherd or have we followed a hireling? What is a hireling? Jesus describes him in John 10:12-13, *“But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.”* A hireling is an opportunist. He is someone who is only interested in himself; he is self-seeking and self-promoting. The hireling is interested in money, *“More pay more preach, less pay less preach, no pay no preach.”* A hireling preaches for popularity and power, *“More prestige more preach, less prestige less preach, no prestige no preach.”*

The Apostle Paul who is a true shepherd of God’s flock warned the believers, *“Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)”* To follow a man is not wrong only if and when he follows the Lord Jesus Christ. This was what Paul himself told the Corinthian Church, *“Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ”* (1 Cor 11:1). We thank God we are following the Good Shepherd, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and not any hireling.

QUESTION: What must a church do to ensure that it does not employ or appoint a pastor who is a hireling?

PRAYER: Lord, save us from the pastor who seeks to fleece and not feed the flock.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 26

JOHN 10:1-9

MATTHEW 7:13-14

“I am the door of the sheep.”

STRAIT AND NARROW

We find life when we enter in by the door of the sheep. Jesus said in John 10:7-9, *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep ... by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.”* The door of Jesus is a narrow door, and leads to a narrow way. It is the narrow door and the narrow way that will lead to life. In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus said, *“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”*

Why is the gate a strait or narrow one? It is because there is but one living and true God, and not many, and there is but one living and true way to heaven and that is Jesus Christ. There is no other God but the God of the Christian Scriptures, and there is no other Saviour save the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”* (John 14:6). Jesus also said, *“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?”* (John 11:25-26).

QUESTION: What are the strait and narrow doctrines and practices of the Bible?

PRAYER: Lord, I know that one with You is the majority.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27

1 JOHN 2:15-17

EXODUS 20:3-5

“Love not the world.”

SPIRITUAL ADULTERY

We will have abundant life only when we walk in the narrow way and shun the broad way. The broad way is described as the way of death, and many are walking in that way. It is the way of Satan, the way of world, the way of sin. The door and the way of life are narrow because they demand that we put away other gods, and live a separated life. The God of the Bible has commanded, *“Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God”* (Exo 20:3-5).

We are also commanded not to befriend the world. To befriend the world is adultery, *“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God”* (Jas 4:4). Are we prepared to let go of our worldly friends, and stop all our worldly activities in order to follow the Lord? The world may call us narrow-minded, but that is precisely what Jesus has called us to be—to be narrow in our thinking, to be narrow in our ways. The world is very broad, but the cross is very narrow. If we want to live we must love the cross and not the world, *“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever”* (1 John 2:15-17).

QUESTION: What are the many ways Christians commit spiritual adultery today?

PRAYER: Lord, keep me pure and chaste for I desire to be faithful to You only.

LORD'S DAY, DECEMBER 28

JOHN 10:25-27

1 JOHN 4:4-5

"My sheep hear my voice."

THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE

We live when we hear the Voice of God and not the voices of men. The Good Shepherd speaks the truth, and His sheep recognise His voice of truth and follow Him. *"And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. ... My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me"* (John 10:4-5,27).

True believers will be able to hear and know the Saviour's voice because they have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. Jesus promised His Spirit to all who love Him, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you"* (John 14:15-17). The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth and will guide us into all Truth (John 16:13, 1 John 5:6). The Apostle John assures all true believers of Christ, *"But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. ... But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him"* (1 John 2:20, 27). John went on to say, *"Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error"* (1 John 4:4-5). How can we tell truth from error? In order to discern truth from error, there is a need to know God's Word deeply, for His Word is Truth (John 17:17).

QUESTION: Does recognising the Shepherd's voice require training?

PRAYER: Lord, help me be ever sensitive to hear and follow Your voice as spoken in Your holy words in the Bible.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 29

LUKE 2:8-14

LUKE 12:51-53

*“On earth peace,
good will toward men”*

PEACE ON EARTH BUT WHEN? (I)

When Jesus came the first time, the angels announced, *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men”* (Lk 2:14). But in Luke 12:51, Jesus said something quite different, *“Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay, but rather division.”* Is there a contradiction, a mistake in the Bible, in the words of God? If there is a mistake, then who is right, the angels who delivered God’s message, or Jesus, the Message of God Himself? It goes without saying that we who believe in the perfection of the Holy Scriptures, the 100% inspiration and 100% preservation of the words of God, believe in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ and of His angels—both spoke the truth, and there are no mistakes in those words at all!

So, how do we explain those infallible words of the angels and of Jesus? The answer lies in God’s perfect Word itself. Jesus indeed came to bring peace into the world as the angels announced, but peace will only come when certain conditions are met. What are these conditions?

Peace will only come when we make peace with God. People in the world today are looking for peace—peace in the world, peace at home, peace at work, peace in church, but they will find it in vain. The reason why there is no peace anywhere on earth is because of sin—we are a sinful people living in a sin-cursed world. That is why we need a Saviour, and that is why Jesus had to come. That is why our Saviour’s name is JESUS for He has come *“to save his people from their sins”* (Matt 1:21). So, in order to have peace, we need to be reconciled to God, and be born again (John 3:3). Yes, unless we are born again, we will not experience peace in our life, we will not have the peace which passes all understanding which only God can give (Phil 4:7).

QUESTION: Is my heart restless or peaceful?

PRAYER: Lord, I want to make peace with You.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 30

JOHN 15:18-20

ROMANS 5:1-5

*“It hated me
before it hated you.”*

PEACE ON EARTH BUT WHEN? (III)

The Lord Jesus Christ, the virgin-born Son of God, who lived a sinless life was the perfect Sacrifice for our sins. He died for our sins on the cross, shed His precious blood as the Lamb of God, and then on the third day rose from the dead. The penalty of sin has been paid, and atonement has been made once and for all. If we will confess our sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved and have peace with God. *“Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Rom 5:1).

Now having made peace with God, you will not have peace on earth for this sinful and satanic world hates God. That was why Jesus said He did not come to give peace on earth but division. James 4:4 says, *“whosoever ... will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”* Similarly, anyone who is a friend of God becomes the enemy of the world. The world will hate the faithful and obedient follower of Christ. Did not the Lord Jesus say, *“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. ... Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also”* (John 15:18-20)? The Apostle Paul said, *“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”* (2 Tim 3:12).

Why is there no peace on earth? Two reasons: evil and error. How can there be peace when the evils of corruption, immorality and terrorism exist? How can there be peace when errors such as liberalism, evolutionism, ecumenism, postmodernism, neo-evangelicalism, charismatism, neo-fundamentalism, open-theism, neo-deism and all kinds of false “ism”s prevail? But did not God promise peace on earth and good will toward men? So when will this peace come?

QUESTION: Are all splits and divisions bad?

PRAYER: Lord, I want to live a separated life so that I might be kept pure from the sins and errors of this world.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 31

ISAIAH 2:1-4

MATTHEW 6:19-21

*“Lay not up for yourselves
treasures upon earth.”*

PEACE ON EARTH BUT WHEN? (III)

Peace will only come when the Prince of peace returns. The leaders of the world are everywhere talking peace which gives us no sense of urgency. But if Jesus Christ is coming again, there will be wars and rumours of wars and we are more alert to His Second Coming.

Only the Lord Jesus Christ—the Prince of peace—can bring true and lasting peace to this world, and He will do that when He comes again. When Jesus returns in all His power and glory, He will judge the nations, and all the nations will kowtow before Him. Under His reign which will last for a thousand years, there will be no wars and no instruments of war. This is prophesied in Isaiah 2:4, *“And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”*

Are you looking forward to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ? You will not be looking forward to the Lord’s return if your mind and heart are geared towards building up your treasures on earth. And if you are chasing after the mighty dollar, and lusting for the material things of this world, for money and property, fame and fortune, then you will find yourself without peace but full of anxieties and worries, envy and jealousy, selfish ambition and strife (1 Tim 6:9-10).

But the Bible has the secret to joy and peace on earth: to believe in Jesus Christ and grow more and more like Him, yearning for the Kingdom of God to come, and desiring for the treasures of heaven (Matt 6:19-21). May the Lord help us to put Him first in our life, and to await eagerly and patiently for His return. The signs of the times do tell us that His Second Coming is very soon.

QUESTION: What are the signs that tell me Jesus is coming back soon?

PRAYER: Lord, I look forward to Your soon return.