

Epistle Of James

"The Christian's Trials"

James Chapter 1 Verses 2 - 18

James was a member of the Lord Jesus' family and his close observance of the Lord, and his impression of His teaching, had brought him to the position of faithful discipleship. So we can be assured that what James has to say to us is vital, since the Holy Spirit of God directed him in all that he wrote in his letter.

I am sure that if you are a committed Christian, you will have had many problems, temptations and trials to face. That in the normal course of life for every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. But what a surprise James has for us in these verses.

(v.2-3) "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance."

That takes some courage, and much faith in the Lord. You see, even trials can be used by God to strengthen us. Persevering in trials builds us up and makes us into mature Christians.

(v.4) "perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

Each one of us must seek to develop like that to the glory of God.

(v.5-8) "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does."

In order to win through in the trials of life, we need a deep understanding of God's will and God's purpose. Such wisdom is not gained in our own strength. We are not skilled enough to understand all things, so we must turn to God in believing prayer. The devil will do all he can to make us doubt, but we must triumph over this and have absolute trust in the Lord. Doubts will never receive blessings from the Lord. True faith in Him is the one thing God asks of us as we seek His wisdom in our lives. Then we can be assured of the promise found in verse 5: "And it WILL be given him."

James now considers human circumstances in verses 9-11:

"The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade even while he goes about his business."

The Christian in humble circumstances is fully loved by God. God will give him all the grace he needs to overcome. He should be thankful to God that he is free from the temptations of the very rich. The Lord can lift him up to a worthy and high position of faith and trust, and will supply his every need.

The Christian who is wealthy will also be grateful to God if he has learnt to trust wholly in the Lord and not in uncertain riches. In this way he learns to be humble and can use his riches for the glory of the Lord. The rich man is as deeply in need of the Lord's pardon as every other person, and the Lord can deliver him from all the trials and temptations that riches may bring.

We saw in verse 2 that trials are to be faced with joy, in God's strength, and now in verse 12 we are reminded of a further blessing:

"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him."

James speaks here of the persevering Christian receiving a crown of life. This is the Scriptural way of describing God's wondrous gift of full salvation, which is salvation from the penalty of sin, from its power, and ultimately from its very presence.

Trials - or testings - may be permitted by God to come into our lives in order to test and strengthen our faith, but God NEVER tempts anyone to do evil.

(v.13) "When tempted, no-one should say, 'God is tempting me'. For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed."

We cannot overcome the sinful desires that comes from within us, except by the power of the Lord working in us. That power is the Holy Spirit of God who dwells in all true believers. That is why we must continually turn to Him for help to overcome in EVERY trial and temptation. Without His power evil desire turns to sin and the consequence of sin is a broken relationship with the Lord, which only brings unhappiness and a sense of failure.

How precious beyond words, though, is the grace of God towards us who believe in that forgiveness is ours when we confess our sins and repent of them:

1 John 1 verse 9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

(v.16-18) These verses remind us that we cannot earn our own salvation by our own efforts, nor can we by our own efforts win the victory over trials and temptation.

"EVERY good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth...."

The extent of God's love is seen in His choosing to give us new life through faith in the Lord Jesus. He is the only way of salvation and the only mediator between God and man. No-one else could ever provide eternal pardon for us, for

Him it was who bore the punishment for our sins in His own body on the cross.

Just as it is impossible for us to attain salvation by our own efforts, so it is only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that we can gain the victory in trials and temptations, and so grow in our Christian lives.

The Apostle Peter, in speaking of the trials that come upon believers has this to say, in 1 Peter 1 verses 6-7:

"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined with fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed."

The Christian's Preparation

James Chapter 1 Verses 19 - 27

Christianity is not merely believing about the Lord Jesus Christ, but it is a continual putting into practice all that God requires of us. True Christianity is a life; a living out of what Christ has made possible in the life of every believer. It is an ongoing experience, and requires careful preparation for the days ahead.

A true Christian longs to grow more like the Lord Jesus Christ day by day. He endeavours to conquer his own selfish desires and habits so that he will never bring shame upon the precious and worthy name of his Saviour. Consequently he needs to be prepared to meet all kinds of experiences and conditions in his life, otherwise he may suddenly be caught out and fail in his purpose.

We read in James chapter 1 verses 19 to 21:

"My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you."

Here self-control is clearly outlined. We must be ready to listen rather than to speak unadvisedly. Wrong words can often produce resentment in others and consequently conflict. Such conflict breeds anger, and instead of love between one another, it produces antagonism. Such a state of affairs is not of God, and can only dishonour His Name. So pray that you will be prepared to put into practice a humble, listening attitude towards others. Be gracious and gentle in your response to all.

James now deals with a tremendously important matter. Look at verses 22 to 25 of James chapter 1:

"Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the Word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it - he will be blessed in what he does."

It is so very easy to read the Scriptures, to agree with what is written, but to fail to put it into practice in one's own life. It is for this reason that so many people present a poor witness and testimony. It is sadly possible to be doctrinally correct but to be ineffective in practical Christianity. We must be well prepared as Christians by listening to God's Word and then DOING what it teaches.

The more we search the Scriptures the more clearly we shall see the kind of person we are, and the kind of person we should be. Failure to DO what we learn from God's Word will mean that we will not make progress. Reading the Scriptures and failing to act on what they teach us is as silly as looking in a mirror and then promptly forgetting what we look like, says James in these verses. The promise to those who read and put into practise what they read is that they will be blessed in all that they do in obedience to God's Word.

And now we look at verses 26 and 27:

"If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

The way in which a person speaks may reveal the kind of person they really are. But words alone are not enough. The life a person lives, the way in which they behave, is always a testimony to their true nature. This is especially true of the Christian man or woman. It is possible to talk in a Christian way, and to imagine that we are effective as Christians, and yet be far away from what we ought to be according to God's Word. If this is the case, as our verse says, we deceive ourselves and our religion is worthless.

It follows that the Christian's preparation for life and witness includes many practical matters. In these verses we have discovered three such practical things:

1. Control of the tongue in speaking,
2. Loving care for those in special need,
3. Keeping clear of the evil influences that are in the world around us.

It is essential that, as Christians, we ask the Lord to control us in our speaking throughout each day. Each morning the tongue should be committed to the Lord so that only what pleases Him passes our lips. In this way those around us will soon become conscious of the high quality of the Christian life, and may well be drawn to the Saviour themselves.

In a similar way, a love for others that is aware of physical needs and does something to supply those needs is evidence of a real and very practical Christianity.

Finally, every Christian must be wary of Satan's devices aimed at spoiling and damaging their profession as Christians. Satan can be very subtle, and the Lord's servant must be ever watchful against all his attacks. No believer should ever meddle with sinful things. To ask, "What's the harm?" is a sure sign that there is doubt about the thing concerned, and it should be avoided. A much more useful question would be, "Does it glorify God, and what will it do to honour His Name?"

A well prepared Christian will only want to do God's will.

The Christian's Relationships

James

Chapter 2 Verses 1 - 12

The passage for this study reads like this:

"My brothers as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favouritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say 'Here's a good seat for you', but say to the poor man, 'You stand there', or 'sit on the floor by my feet', have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?"

There is some very sound advice here! "Do not show favouritism." Who are we to express such judgement on another? Rich and poor are of equal value to God. After all, Christ died for all conditions of men. As followers of the Saviour we as Christians must be like Him in heart and love for all.

It is true that those who are considered lowly in the eyes of the world are often those who most readily respond to God's call to them. Notice how James expresses this in verses 5 and 6:

"Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom He promised to those who love Him? But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you?"

It so often happens that those who have much of this world's goods and those who are in comfortable positions tend to put their trust in these things instead of in the Lord. They become proud of their possessions and come to despise those who are less fortunate. A Christian must never let such things happen. If we are blessed with much then we must still be loving and sympathetic to those who have less. We must be willing to share of the things the Lord has entrusted to us with those in need. Mutual Christian love must always be the characteristic of every Christian community.

This quality of Christian living is not merely something which is commendable. It is actually a command from God, and that not only in the New Testament, but also in the Old Testament. James put it like this in verse 8:

"If you keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbour as yourself', you are doing right."

James is here quoting Leviticus chapter 19 verse 18 which also says:

"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord."

This is the "Royal Law." It is God's standard, a standard He expects us to keep. If we do not keep that standard we are breaking God's law; and if we break God's law we are guilty of sinning against Him.

This brings us back to the matter of showing favouritism to some people:

(v.9) "But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as law-breakers. For whoever keeps the whole law at yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

What James is trying to teach the believers here is the fact that there is really no such thing as a "little sin." Anything which is contrary to the love of God is contrary to His law

of love. Every brother and sister in Christ is equally precious to the Lord. Therefore we must not set one up above another. This does not mean that we do not respect those whom God has placed over us, but that we should honour them and serve them well. But we LOVE all Christians equally because we are all equal in the sight of God.

So it is no light thing to oppose God's will. The standards of Christian relationships set out for us in this passage are those at which every believer should aim. If all of us were to reach up to this manner of living, then the world around would quickly recognise what it really means to be a Christian, and the change that trusting the Lord Jesus brings. Anything less than this will be a very poor testimony.

James concluding verses in this passage sum up for us the whole situation:

(v.12-13) "Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgement without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgement."

We are reminded again that our speech and our lives are both vital in demonstrating our Christian faith. It is possible to speak the truth, to proclaim all the correct doctrines of the Scriptures, and yet never show it in the way we live - in our actions. Sadly this does happen from time to time in the lives of professing Christians. How often have you heard it said, "Well, if that's what a Christian does, I don't want to be one!" This only brings shame on the name of the Lord.

So James is saying that we must speak and LIVE the Christian life. It must be Christ Himself who is living and working through us. We should want people to see HIM and not us in the things we say and do.

Guard against any form of pride in being a Christian. You are only a Christian because of God's mercy towards you. What you are is by His grace, totally unmerited by you. Any good that you may accomplish can only come from the power of the Lord within you by His Spirit. Even the power to love the unlovely, and to avoid all kinds of favouritism must spring from Him.

Continue daily to pray that you will truly show the love of God in your life and in the things you say. Put James' advice into practice. Seek always to be just what Christ wants you to be. That is the way to a good Christian testimony and to victory and joy in living.

"The Christian Faith In Action"

James

Chapter 2 Verses 14 - 25

In any law suit those who are involved in judging the case search thoroughly for evidence in support of the claim being made. Likewise, scientists continually search for evidence to indicate the accuracy of their lines of investigation. In just the same way, the genuine profession of Christian faith must be shown by clear evidence of its outworking.

We are looking now at verses 14 to 17:

"What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed', but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

The example given here is obvious. A person in desperate physical need is not going to be helped by mere WORDS, however sympathetic they may sound. His need of food and clothing can only be met by someone actually giving them to him. In just the same way, says James, a person's faith is shown to be genuine.

True faith in the Lord Jesus Christ MUST result in a change of attitude, life and behaviour. Anything less would be nothing more than hollow-sounding words. "Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, IS DEAD."

Christianity is not just a matter of giving mental assent to the teachings of Christ. Such teachings are of vital importance, but the truth and reality of them are shown as they are put into practice in the life of the Christian believer.

The indwelling person of Christ, by His Holy Spirit, MUST produce the fruit of a new life in those who obey Him. That fruit is recognised in the behaviour of the Christian. His works indicate the very presence of Christ in him, and so become the evidence to all around that TRUE faith is effective in him.

Now look at verses 18 and 19:

"But someone will say, 'You have faith, I have deeds'. Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder."

These verses come as a real challenge. Even the devil himself believes that there is one God. He is absolutely certain of it. He knows it. But that does not save him. The works of the devil are only evil, deceitful and destructive. This demonstrates to us that believing ABOUT God is not enough. We must not only believe ABOUT Him, but believe IN Him. That is our whole trust must be in HIM. We must be committed to Him through our Lord Jesus Christ. Being committed to Him means that His power must show through us daily, resulting in works which prove the reality of our faith. Anything less than this is useless.

(v.20-24) "You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the Scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness', and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone."

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Abraham, always considered a fine example of true faith, is used here to express what James is teaching. Abraham's practical obedience to God meant that he could only have taken that action because of his absolutely genuine trust in God. We are told this in Hebrews 11 v.17-19:

"By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned'. Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death".

We see, then, that Abraham's ACTIONS proved the value of his faith.

James now makes a bold statement that must challenge each one of us:

(v.26) "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."

It is vital for each one of us that we put our faith into daily practice. Only in this way will people see our good works and so glorify our Heavenly Father.

What are these practical things that Christians must do to show that faith is real? As we have seen, a true Christian's actions are the fruit of God's Spirit at work within him, and they are not a series of self-made actions. Paul puts it this way in writing to the church in Galatia:

Galatians chapter 5 verses 16 and 22-23

"Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature, rather serve one another in love.... The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

Are not these things that are so needed in our world today? People are longing for the love and grace, which only real Christians can show by a Spirit-controlled daily life. Outgoing kindness in practical things means much to those in need. Forgiveness to those who have wronged a Christian may well be the means of turning them to the Saviour. Very often it is not preaching that wins others to Christ but loving, sympathetic action in times of need.

The Lord Jesus Himself emphasised this need for practical faith when He said: "Inasmuch as you have done it to one of these my children you have done it to me." Practical love shown to anyone, and especially to His people, is counted as practical love shown to the Lord Himself. What a wonderful incentive this is to us all to show our faith by the things we do for others.

THE CHRISTIAN AND HIS TONGUE

JAMES CHAPTER 3 V. 1-12

Communicating the Christian life very much involves the way we speak, and this is what James deals with in these early verses of chapter 3. Inevitably those who teach must use language in order to communicate with those who are to learn from them. Those who are called to minister and teach the truths of Christianity must be especially careful in what they say. All leaders of Christian communities will have to give an account to God of what they say and do.

See what James says when he makes this point in verses 1 and 2:

"Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check."

What is emphasised here is the awful power of the tongue. All sorts of things can happen, for good or bad, by what we say. Notice how this is illustrated for us in verses 3 to 6:

"When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell."

The small bit in the horse's mouth; the small rudder on a ship; the small spark that sets up the blaze, all illustrate how a small word can issue in widespread effects. Clearly there is a responsibility on every Christian to guard the tongue. If this is not done great harm can follow, affecting not only the speaker's life, but also the lives of those who hear.

Look now at verses 7 to 12 of this chapter:

"All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed, and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig-tree bear olives, or a grape-vine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water."

Every Christian should seek from the Lord control of the tongue at all times. It is not enough to speak in a Christ-like way sometimes, and then at other times to voice things that are harmful, selfish or evil. Of course we live in an evil world and are continually surrounded by things which are not of God. But that is no reason for us to be influenced by them and allow our standards to fall.

There are in some places freshwater springs that flow down to the seashore. Twice every day the tide comes in and floods over them, but as the tide recedes, pure, fresh water continues to flow from the springs, quite unaffected by the flood of saltiness that engulfed them for a time. That is how we must live as Christians. We are IN the world but NOT OF IT. Out of us must flow rivers of living water to the thirsty souls around. That living water is the power of the Holy Spirit commending the Lord Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father.

There are times to speak, and times to be silent. At His trial before Pontius Pilate our Lord Jesus had ready answers to give when needed, and was also able to be silent when that was best. It is so easy to give quick, sharp answers in self defence, and to stand up for what we imagine to be our rights, as people say. But if our lives are fully committed to the Lord, then He will give us the understanding when to be silent and when to speak.

It is not up to us to make rules about this. God may urge us to do one thing on one occasion, and quite a different thing on another. I find it good to ask God to guide me through each day, and to keep me willing to obey Him, and to be ready always for what He wants me to do. This readiness to be obedient, and to DO the will OF THE LORD, is, I am sure, one secret of victory over the tongue.

It is not always necessary to give a long talk about Christianity to those you meet. A quiet simple testimony of what God has done for YOU is usually more effective. But it is very often in the ordinary affairs of life that we get tripped up in our speech. Someone speaks to us sharply, and before we realise it we have answered back in the same tone. Someone does us a bad turn and we respond with angry words. These are the times which must be guarded against, and when we must keep our tongue under control.

Perhaps you have tried hard to overcome such a failing. You will never overcome in your own strength. It is only as you recognise your weakness, and are willing to ask the Lord Jesus to take over and for Him to control you, that victory can come. Pray about this, and trust Him. Then you will see that as time passes by you will be given the victory, and your tongue will speak like Him, and of Him.

I am sure that as you read these studies of the Scriptures you will be discovering how very practical the Word of God is. It is not just a theoretical or theological book, but it carries the very Word of Life, and reveals to those who read it how they can live triumphantly over all the trials and temptations of life.

"The Christian's Wisdom"

James

Chapter 3 Verses 13 - 18

In his letter James has consistently sought to emphasise the practical aspects of Christian living. The right kind of behaviour demonstrates the validity of the Christian life. Wholesome speech and control of the tongue show the life of Christ within the believer.

In the passage we are going to study next, James is concerned that the right kind of wisdom is found in each one of the Lord's people. Consider first verse 13:

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom."

Here the emphasis is on the deeds done, for these demonstrate the true nature of the person concerned. What we DO shows what we ARE. The Scripture talks of "deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom." Such wisdom can only come from Christ Himself. In 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 24 Paul refers to - "Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." This wisdom is explained more fully in verse 30 of the same chapter - "It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, Who has become for us WISDOM from God - THAT IS, our righteousness, holiness and redemption".

From these verses we discover that the blessing of wisdom is really the blessing of the indwelling Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. No one could have been more humble than He was, and if He lives in us then we must show deeds that come from Him. Anything other than this cannot be from God.

(v.14-16) "But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such 'wisdom' does not come down from Heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice."

The Scripture leaves no room for compromise here. A Christian must show that he is truly wise by putting into practice the things James has been speaking about, with the same humility found in the Lord Jesus.

(v.17-18) "But the wisdom that comes from Heaven is first pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness."

In these verses we have a clear definition of the divine wisdom - the wisdom that comes from Heaven. We are now going to consider each of the qualities of this heavenly wisdom, and we will discover that they are the qualities of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. IT IS PURE.

Anything that is really pure contains not a trace of impurity. That is what was said of the Lord Jesus at His trial before Pilate. The Roman Governor said, "I find no fault in him." Later, Paul in writing to the Corinthian believers said, in referring to Christ, "God made Him who had no sin to be a sin offering for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5 v.21)

We who, by faith in Christ, have been made pure in God's sight, must also be pure in our lives before Him and before our fellow-men. This is true wisdom that comes from above.

2. IT IS PEACE LOVING.

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This immediately reminds us that "He (Jesus) is our peace." It is in the Lord Jesus Christ that we have peace with God. The full penalty of our sins was paid by Him, and our sins blotted out, so that nothing can now separate us from the love of God.

The effect of this on our behaviour should be that we seek to be a peaceful influence on all around us. This surely is a wise way to live.

3. IT IS CONSIDERATE.

This is something that takes into account the whole situation and gives sympathetic understanding to those concerned. This reminds us of the High Priestly office of our Saviour who is now in Heaven interceding for us.

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin." (Hebrews 4 v.15)

In our relationship with others, each one of us needs this divine perception and sympathy. Many a situation occurs in which human wisdom is simply not able to cope. Something beyond our own thoughts is needed, so we are once again cast upon the Lord who understands, for HIS wisdom.

4. IT IS SUBMISSIVE.

True wisdom never parades itself in dominating others. A humble readiness to respect the other person is very precious. Such submission was very evident in the life of our Lord Jesus. He was submissive to the will of His Father, and although He is the Son of God, He was servant of all. That is how we are to be as Christians if we are to be like our Lord and show true heavenly wisdom.

5. IT IS FULL OF MERCY.

Mercy is undeserved favour, and every one of us who is a Christian has received mercy from the Lord Himself. Obviously we shall be wise indeed if we demonstrate like mercy to those around us. This is such a Christ-like quality that it will greatly commend the Christian faith and we cannot afford to be without it.

6. IT IS FULL OF GOOD FRUIT.

"Good fruit" is a quality which one would expect to find in all who are the children of God, for in them dwells the Holy Spirit of God. Just as one expects to find oranges on an orange tree because of the nature of the tree, so Christ-like "fruit", or characteristics, is to be expected in the life of those in whom Christ lives.

7. IT IS IMPARTIAL.

This means that we should regard all men and women as equal in value in the sight of God. We must never be those who give favour and respect only to those who happen to please us more than others. We must show Christian love to ALL, whatever their creed, nation, language, position or ability.

The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to the knowledge of the truth in Him. To be impartial in our dealings with others is a characteristic of the wisdom that comes from above.

8. IT IS SINCERE.

All that we say and do must be transparently open, and we must be those whose word can be trusted, and those upon whom others can always rely. Is not this just how our Lord Jesus was as He moved among the people down here? His words were the truth and could be trusted, and His disciples knew that they could depend upon Him in all things. John could say of Him:

"We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH." (John 1 v.14)

These, then, are the characteristics of the true wisdom that comes from God that He is looking for in the lives of His children. It is a wise person in deed who puts them into practice in the power of the Holy Spirit.

James' final word in this passage is in v.18 and has to do with PEACEMAKERS. He says that "those who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness." Those whose wisdom is that of the Lord Jesus Christ, have the joy of reaping a rich harvest of the things of God, both in their own lives and in the lives of others.

This must be the target for each one of us as Christians - to live for the glory of our Saviour. Then God will be satisfied with what He is working out through us, and we shall be gloriously satisfied with Him as well.

"Those who turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever."

That is only possible as we have this wisdom of God as our daily experience.

"The Christian's Submission"

James

Chapter 4 Verses 1 - 12

In this letter James' whole concern is to write to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ in order to strengthen them in faith and good works. It comes to us as a surprise to find out that, in this passage, he talks about fights and quarrels! This shows how very careful Christians must be that they do not allow evil things to get into their lives.

James 4 v.1-3:

"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."

It is indeed strange that there should be fights and quarrel amongst Christians. James goes to the root of the problem straight away when he says, "Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" Personal desires that have never been submitted to the Lord Jesus Christ will always cause trouble. Because you do not get what you want, you fret about it, develop a discontented spirit, which soon expresses itself in irritation with others, and the quarrels break out. My brothers, these things ought not to be.

James goes on to indicate where the trouble really lies. It concerns asking God in the right way for all that is needed. Those who do not ask GOD for all that is needed can hardly expect answers. Asking God implies that there is faith in God. But when we ask God for anything it must be in the right way. The prayer which continually says, "Give me!", "Give me!", "Give me!", is not the right way in which to approach our all-holy, all-loving Father. Asking Him for anything must always be from the RIGHT MOTIVE, that is, that the answer may be for God's glory and according to HIS will. Our requests must never be merely to gratify our own selfish desires. No Christian worthy of the name will seek answers to prayer simply to satisfy his pleasure.

So, when you read in the Scriptures, "Ask and you shall receive", remember that this is qualified by these statements in James' letter, and by other Scriptures that indicate that we must always ask with the will of God in mind. What a transformation in Christian relationships this would bring about if we always asked the Lord first in that submissive way!

James 4 v.4-6:

"You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit He caused to live in us tends towards envy, but He gives us more grace? That is why the Scripture says, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble'".

The Christian's loyalty must always be towards God, and never towards worldly or evil things. The use of the word "world" in these verses is referring to those persons and principles that are opposed to God's standards. You cannot live effectively for God if you are friendly towards evil in any form. The Christian life is a battle. We are called to oppose and fight against evil. We are IN the world but NOT OF IT.

Perhaps you feel incapable of winning the victory here, but notice that it is written, "He gives us more grace." This is God reaching out to us in unmerited favour, so that we CAN

find all that we need to win through, so long as we submit to Him. "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble".

The practical way to triumph is given in verses 7 to 10:

"Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands you sinners, and purify your hearts you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up."

Victory has a two-fold aspect: submission to God by drawing near to Him, and resistance to the devil. Drawing near to God in heartfelt love and confidence will mean that He will draw near to you. Conversely, resisting the devil means that he will flee from you. These are definite and practical promises that we can rely on and so we can experience victory over all the temptations of the adversary. As you become aware of things which defile your life, and which need cleansing away, and as you humble yourself in submission before God, then "He will build you up." Up from the things that have been defeating you. Up to His glorious power and a fullness of life that only He can give you. Surely such submission is uplifting!

Verses 11 and 12 explain for us further relationships between individual Christians:

"Brothers do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him, speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it. There is only one law-giver and judge, the One who is able to save and destroy. But you - who are you to judge your neighbour?"

No one is sufficiently wise to know everything. Only God can do that. So it is very foolish to speak against other Christians. Nor are we called to judge one another adversely. If ever you think a fellow-Christian is making a mistake, pray about it first, and then if the Lord so leads, go to them quietly and talk over the situation in brotherly love.

Never talk about someone behind their back. You MAY be wrong in your judgement, not knowing all the facts. Slandering that person could cause terrible distress and ruin fellowship. Never be a tale-bearer. We are to love our brothers and sisters in Christ just as HE loves us. To act like this will make a wonderful contribution to the development of joyous Christian fellowship, which will bring honour to the Lord.

In these verses the supremacy of God, the one law-giver and judge, is the vital point. He alone has the right and holiness to give just laws, to set just standards for men, and so is worthy to receive the submission of all. Submit yourself, then, to God!

"The Christian And The Future"

James

Chapter 4 Verses 13 - 17

People have always been curious about the future. Many try to find out what is going to happen to them in the days ahead. Others claim to have special skills and the ability to tell the future. What should be the Christian's attitude to all this?

Scripture lays down some important principles, as we shall discover.

James 4 v.13-17:

"Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.' As it is you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins."

It is clear that nobody but God can really know the future. This attribute is solely His. Consequently it is not in man's power to decide precisely and exactly what he will do even on the morrow. No one knows the duration of his own life. It is "a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes."

When a person puts their whole trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, then that one must recognise the lordship of Christ. That person's future is in God's hands, and so all their planning for the future must be subject to His will. We must always say, in making our plans, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

An attitude like this inspires confidence to go forward knowing that God is in control of every moment. This is the reason why we can rejoice in what Paul writes in Romans 6 v. 28:

"We KNOW that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."

This means that we must not seek to order our lives in OUR way, but must willingly submit to Him, and surrender to Him the WHOLE of our lives. Nothing must be kept back from Him. Such a surrender to the loving will of God will mean that we shall expect Him to work in us, through us, and for us. He loves His own. He has promised to never leave us. He has promised to carry us through all the experiences of life. He has promised to direct our paths. The Christian's future is assured.

Knowing that the future is in the hands of our loving God, we must avoid any preconceived ideas of what our life is to be like. For example, it does not mean that we will have an easy path all the way. The Christian life is a constant battle against the world, our own sinful natures, and against the devil. Remember, however, that we battle from a victorious position. Victory is of the Lord, and if we walk with Him, by the power of His Spirit within us, then we shall experience all needed grace to meet every situation that the future may unfold.

Then, too, we shall realise that we are no different from others, and that the common experiences of life will be ours. Even the Lord Jesus was tempted in all points as we are, and faced disappointments, betrayal and suffering, yet He never sinned, and His trust was completely in His Father. That is why He can take us through all of life's trials and temptations and keep us from falling.

If evil men sought to harm the Lord, they will certainly seek to do the same to His followers. So do not be surprised when you come up against opposition as a believer. Remember that at such times the Lord will make a way for you so that you will be able to stand for Him, and bear it. The Scripture tells us that He will never allow you to be tempted above what you are able.

Of course, we must never try to run away from God and make all our own plans. That would be the sure route to failure. Nor must we ever try to persuade the Lord to give us all WE want. God knows the end from the beginning, we do not. And so we can never know what is God's best for us in any situation. God, who has promised to guide us step by step, is the One whom we must follow closely and obediently, committing our present and our future to Him.

It may be that at some point in our life, either deliberately or carelessly, we choose our own way and make our own plans without consulting the Lord. If ever that should happen, there is only one thing to do. We must come to Him admitting our wrong and seeking His pardon. We may well have to suffer the consequences of our actions, but the Lord will graciously pardon, restore us, and encourage us to go on with Him into the future, along HIS chosen path. Do learn from any such experiences to rely continually on Him.

Often the Lord will call us to do some specific work for Him. Sometimes in these situations we feel inadequate, and fail to do what is right. Notice now what James said in v.17:

"Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins"

Have you realised this? It is just as much a sin to fail to do good, as it is to do something which is positively wrong. Face up to this challenge, and see to it that you will always be active in doing the will of God. Have confidence in Him to guide and enable you in the power of His Holy Spirit.

The Bible is full of details of men of God who looked to the Lord for guidance in their everyday lives. Moses continually sought God's plan for himself and the Israelites he was leading. He feared to do anything without God's help and direction. Gideon looked for the Lord's plan and presence when he had an important battle to fight. David looked to God to care for him in the days before he was to become king. He never tried to hurry God along, but steadily waited until the Lord made moves on his behalf.

Jeremiah trusted God to provide his every need in the days when he had an unpopular message to give to his nation. Daniel never failed to pray to God and trust Him, even when it looked as though his life was to be threatened. Three God-fearing young men were prepared to be burnt to death, rather than to fail their God, and they saw the miracle of God in delivering them from the furnace.

Paul trusted the Lord to keep him and uphold him in the days when there was great opposition to his preaching, and when he suffered imprisonment and shipwreck as he pursued the will of God for him. The Lord Jesus Himself prayed in His hour of trial, "Father, not my will, but yours be done."

It is up to each one of us to commit our future to the Lord and rest in Him confidently. If He is in charge then we need not fear, nor do we need to know beforehand what are to be our experiences in the days ahead. The Christian can say, "I do not know what the future holds, but I know the One who holds the future."

An Up-To-Date Warning

James

Chapter 5 Verses 1 - 6

Although James wrote his letter a long time ago, it has been of great value to every generation, as has the whole of the Bible. In the passage that we looking at now he gives us a warning which is still very up-to-date.

One temptation which comes easily to us all is to put our trust in material things to the exclusion of confidence in God alone. Wealth is so powerful in the world that it easily blinds us to real values, and can bring about all sorts of wrong desires. In these verses there is set before us some of the awful consequences of misplaced trust.

(v.1-6) "Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay to the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you."

These are very strong words indeed, but they still reflect what we see in the world around us in our day. It is so easy to go on greedily gaining wealth as a kind of insurance against the future, and in the course of doing this, moral values and honesty are swept aside. The welfare of others is ignored in the rush to pile wealth upon wealth. Here is a strong warning to those who are rich in material wealth. A warning not to be deceived in this way.

It is not that money itself is evil, but it IS evil to make it the main object of our lives. It is the LOVE of money that is evil. In Psalm 62 v. 10, David sets out God's standard with regard to riches:

"Though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them".

This is not an isolated piece of advice, for the same theme is repeated several times in the New Testament. In the Lord's parable of the sower, one of the things that can so easily come into the life and choke the development of a godly life, is the deceitfulness of riches.

Mark 4 v.19: "But the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desire for others things, come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful."

In Mark chapter 10 there is the story of the rich young man who came to the Lord Jesus Christ seeking to follow Him. But it was his riches that were the hindrance that prevented him from trusting the Lord. See what Jesus said in v.23:

"Jesus looked around and said, 'How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God!'"

Note that the Lord did not say it was impossible for the rich to enter, but that it was HARD. Hard because sinful man finds it easier to trust in wealth than to trust in God. Those who have been entrusted with material riches are accountable to the Lord for the ways in which they use it.

Paul wrote in a similar way in 1 Timothy chapter 6 v.17-19:

"Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, Who richly provides

us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life."

"Uncertain riches", they are called here, and they are just that! No one can be absolutely certain of security in riches. There are countless stories of some who have had great wealth but who through their own foolishness, or through circumstances beyond their control, have overnight been reduced to poverty. It is much more certain to put one's hope in God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the latter part of these verses we see the tragic result of being greedy for wealth in the way it so often affects the lives of others adversely. Some are defrauded of their proper wages so that the rich can become richer. This is a great injustice, and must never be permitted in the life of any Christian. It is breaking the second commandment that we should love our neighbour as ourselves.

The inordinate love of wealth has even led some to unjustly condemn and murder innocent people, says James. This reveals the awful extent to which the desire for riches can go in those who are without Christ. All this is another very strong warning to the Christian never to allow the love of riches to take control of him.

James also talks of people living in luxury and self-indulgence. This, too, should be abhorrent to the Christian. We must take notice of those who are in deep need. Remember how this practical out-working of Christian faith was expressed in James chapter 2 v. 14-17. The Christian faith must always be expressed in loving action.

No Christian ever loses by being generous towards others. In Paul's letter to the Philippians chapter 4 v.14-19 he talks about their goodness in helping to supply his deep need, and how grateful he is for this. He then says, in v.19:

"And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus."

We are reminded of something that Paul wrote to the Corinthians concerning our Saviour, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8 v.9) The more we get to know and love HIM so the more we shall value Him, all He has done for us. This in turn should motivate us in our liberality towards those in need.

So, from this warning passage of James' Letter, we must always be on the look out for anything which begins to take our eyes off the Lord Himself. It need not be riches. It could be anything in which we put our trust, even for a short while. It could be in some other person whom we admire. It could be in some great plan we have for our lives.

The practising Christian must keep looking to Jesus and to Him alone for all the strength and guidance he needs. So we must put our entire trust in Him and not in uncertain riches or indeed in anything else.

"The Christian's Patience"

James

Chapter 5 Verses 7 - 12

The Christian believer, having committed his life into the hands of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, is then called to live a consistent God-honouring life. This does not mean he will be free from problems, trials, difficulties and temptations. It is at times like these that the believer must remember that the Lord has promised to continually guide and uphold him, and will strengthen him as a result of the experiences through which he passes. This calls for real patience all along the Christian pathway, and so this is the subject of this study and these verses in James 5.

(v.5-7) "Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!"

Patience that rests confidently in the Lord and in the fulfilment of His purpose, is a good testimony for Him. Growth in the Christian life is to be an ongoing experience. Just as a seed sown needs to germinate, absorb the life-giving materials from the soil, ultimately resulting in a bountiful harvest, so the life of the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ needs time to come to maturity.

In times of stress when patience is severely tried, Satan often comes to us to discourage and to pull us down. We become irritable towards others and this causes disharmony, especially if we are impatient with our fellow-Christians. Or perhaps jealousy creeps in and we show an unloving spirit to one another.

James clearly warns against such things and says, "Don't grumble against each other, or you will be judged." He reminds us that the return of the Lord Jesus is near, and that we shall have to give an answer to Him for all we have done as His followers. It would be wise indeed for each one of us to live as though the Lord might return at ANY time. John puts it this way in 1 John 3 v.3: "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself just as He is pure." What a fine incentive to a holy life!

It is also in times of suffering that we need to exhibit patience as we see in verses 10 and 11:

"Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy."

The Scriptures are full of records of those who suffered for the sake of the Lord; who continued firm to the end, and so brought honour to the Lord. It would be good to read the story of Job in the Old Testament, and to note how wonderfully God upheld him and gave him patience as he suffered physically and spiritually. In the end Job was able to testify to the faithfulness of God through all his hard experiences.

The Lord understands all about us and is full of compassion and mercy toward us. He never calls us to pass through situations with which HE cannot deal, or which would overwhelm us. He only asks us to keep our eyes on Him, and not to try to battle through alone. We must be patient, remembering that He alone knows the end from the beginning, and what His ultimate purpose is for us. At the beginning of his letter, James has shown us that testings and trials are for the strengthening and proving of our faith.

It is always good to turn at once to the Lord as soon as we perceive some problem or trial before us, and to ask for the help He longs to give. Such expression of our faith in Him will wonderfully strengthen us. It will not only give us comfort and confidence, but will also be a witness to those who observe us. In both of these ways God will be glorified. Be patient, waiting on the Lord, even though at first there may be no change in the situation. This is the key to victory, so seek to put it into practice in your life today.

James' final thoughts in this passage remind us once more of the value of pure speech:

(v.12) "Above all, my brothers, do not swear - not by Heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your 'Yes' be yes, and your 'No', no, or you will be condemned."

Our conversation should always be pure and clear so that everyone knows we mean what we say. Swearing an oath is not for a Christian. Our Lord made this very clear when, as recorded in Matthew chapter 5 v.34 to 37, He said:

"But I tell you, Do not swear at all by Heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is His footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot even make one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be yes, and your 'No', no; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."

Such teaching is very clear, and we may not argue about it. The Christian needs to be very patient and to remain obedient to the Lord's command.

Nobody enjoys suffering, or ridicule, or opposition, yet these are often the experiences of true believers, and it is in these situations that we need to be very patient. As we have seen, the Christian's only remedy is in the demonstration of godly patience. It is in this way that we can apply, in a practical way, our faith in the Lord.

"The Christian's Praying"

James

Chapter 5 Verses 13 - 18

Practical Christian living requires constant walking with the Lord in the path of His choosing. There must be continual reliance on Him, and a readiness to do His will and not our own. In trouble and in joy we must turn to the Lord and seek from Him all the help we need. James brings out this point in the latter part of chapter 5, and concentrates specially on the place of prayer.

(v.13-18) "Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops."

Notice that prayer and praise are both needed. A Christian must never forget to return thanks to God and to praise Him for all He is, and for all He has done for him. In trouble, pray. In joyous times, praise.

James takes up the example of illness, and explains that it is right to ask the leaders of the church - the elders - to pray for those who are sick. He makes two points clear. Firstly, that such praying must be with faith in the Lord. It is not to be the mere repetition of some formal words. Secondly, there is the need for sins to be forgiven. This will only come when the one concerned is truly repentant, and therefore willing to turn away from any sinful acts in which they have been involved. The healing James speaks of is no "magic formula" to be used by all and sundry. It is the humble confidence in our mighty God, and a readiness to submit to His will, that brings God's response. Note that it is the prayer of a RIGHTEOUS man that is powerful and effective.

The example given is that of Elijah. The story is told in the Old Testament in 1 Kings chapter 17 and 18. James points out that Elijah was an ordinary man "just like us", and yet he had remarkable answers to prayer. Of course, Elijah's aim was the glory of God. He was concerned for God's honour, and that is the reason why his sincere prayers were answered. We have no promise that SELFISH prayers will be answered. When we consider some of the other passages in Scripture dealing with prayer, and fit them together, then the whole subject becomes very clear.

James himself, in chapter 1 verses 6 and 7, drew attention to the part which faith plays in true praying:

"When he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is double-minded, unstable in all he does."

In 1 Timothy chapter 2 verse 8, Paul writes:

"I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing."

It is prayer from cleansed hearts that is availing. God has no pleasure in anyone who continues in sin. To illustrate this point consider what our Lord said as recorded in Luke chapter 18 verses 10 to 14:

"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax-collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God I thank you that I am not like other men - robbers, evil-doers, adulterers - or even like this tax-collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax-collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to Heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'god, have mercy on me, a sinner!' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

One man SAID A PRAYER that availed nothing. The other PRAYED FROM HIS HEART in desperate need and was justified.

There is further teaching on the place of and effectiveness of prayer in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians chapter 6 verses 18 to 20:

"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth words may be given to me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains...."

Notice several points in these verses:

1. Prayer must be in the power of the Holy Spirit on all occasions.

As mentioned earlier, it must never be a mere repetition of words. True prayer is a work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian. God looks on our hearts, and sees what we are really like. He can never be deceived by our words.

2. Prayer requires us to be alert.

We must be quick to bring all situations to God and seek His guidance and help immediately.

3. Prayer should be directed personally on behalf of others.

Paul refers here to the need for much prayer for all who witness for Christ Jesus, that they will do so fearlessly and faithfully. Every Christian bears some responsibility for upholding others in prayer. The members of each local church should regularly pray for their pastors and teachers. Parents must pray for their children day by day so that they will be preserved from evil influences, and be led to put their faith in God for themselves.

We all need to pray for God's hand upon us throughout the whole day. It is good to find time in the morning to come to God in prayer, before the temptations and problems of the day crowd in. Never allow Satan to crowd out your prayer time.

"The Christian's Witness"

James

Chapter 5 Verses 19 - 20

It is a wonderful thing to be a Christian; to be forgiven for sins and to have the assurance of God's love, guidance and blessing. But have you ever asked yourself the question, "Why does God leave us here on earth in the presence of so much sin?" As Paul once said, it would be far better to be in Heaven with the Lord. There is a very simple but vital answer to that question. It is that we are saved to serve and to be witnesses to those around us.

In Acts 1 v. 8 the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my WITNESSES ... to the ends of the earth."

In the concluding verses of his letter, James gives an important reason why Christians should be witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ.

(v.19-20) "My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover a multitude of sins."

The bringing of sinners to the Lord is the tremendous result of faithful Christian witness. There is great joy in knowing that through one's witness another person has experienced the love and grace of the Lord, and has been saved from the wrath to come, and is walking with Jesus.

True Christian witness can only come by God's Holy Spirit working in and through a born-again believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. To be an effective witness, though, we need much prayer so that we shall be kept in the will of God.

Ephesians chapter 6 v.19 and 20:

"Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I may fearlessly make known the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly as I should."

Here Paul is asking for prayer that as he witnesses the right words MAY BE GIVEN HIM. That is, that he may respond solely to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Even the apostle Paul did not want to speak in words of human wisdom, but with the words given him by the Lord. Such words would enable him to make known the truth of the Gospel fearlessly and with authority.

Perhaps you are fearful about speaking for Christ. Do not be discouraged if you feel like that. Even the greatest men of God experience this, and remember Satan will attempt to defeat God's work by playing on these fears. Take the problem to the Lord in prayer and RELY ON HIM give you the victory over your fears. I have a friend who was very nervous of speaking to people about Jesus as he went from door to door. He even hoped that people would be out so that he would not have to speak to them! But after prayer together with other Christians, he did it, and soon found great joy in his witness. He had been given a real victory over his fear, and was able to rejoice in the Lord's use of him.

But our Christian witness is not only in word, but also in our behaviour. What we ARE is noticed by everybody, and very often God can influence others by our behaviour.

I know of a school teacher who consistently lived for Jesus Christ and showed this by the quality of her work and by her demeanour. One day the head teacher sent for her and asked why she was different from the others. The teacher did not at first realise what the question meant, but as the Head explained, she realised it was her Christian way of life

James

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that had been noticed. She then quietly spoke of her faith in, and love for Christ, with the result that shortly afterwards the head teacher became a Christian, too. That was really effective Christian witness, not, in the first instance by words, but by manner of life.

Those who are Christian pastors, teachers or leaders are in a very responsible position as regards their witness. They are watched closely by others, and even small lapses seem large whenever they occur in those holding such positions. Also, those whom they serve are liable to copy their behaviour. If that behaviour and witness is not true to the Lord in every point, then someone may well be led astray. The responsibility for this will then lie at the door of the one concerned.

So what can you do to be a faithful Christian witness?

First, commit yourself to the Lord for cleansing from all sin.

Then, ask Him to take you and mould you in accordance with His will, for His plan and purpose.

Ask Him to lead you each day in all you do, so that your witness by your behaviour will tell for God.

Ask the Lord to lead you to those people to whom He wants you to speak, and to give you the words to say.

Daily study the Bible so that you know God's message to you, and His message for others.

Rely on the Holy Spirit to do His work. Remember it is not your skill, but HIS that brings the fruit that is pleasing to God.

If you follow these principles, and remain humble before the Lord, then you will become a faithful Christian witness, and honour and glory will be brought to the Name of the Lord. That is the real purpose of the Christian life. That is what brings eternal joy and satisfaction to the believer.

James

"The Main Points Of The Letter"

God's revelation of Himself is given to us in the Bible, and this has come to us through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit working in men wholly yielded to Him. God has not only revealed something of His own nature, but He has made it clear how Christians should live day by day. This is the purpose of this letter written by James that we have been studying. In concluding this series we are going to think over the main points of the whole letter.

No Christian will find life always easy. It is inevitable that in this world, where there is so much evil, great problems and difficulties will come our way. But God always enables those who trust Him to win through.

Chapter 1 v.12: "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those that love Him."

Even in the midst of such times of difficulty, the Christian is expected to stand firm and not allow these things to defeat him. The way we live and speak in times of trial are quickly noticed by those around us. By keeping true to the Lord, and being victorious in Christian living, we bring honour to His Name. This is the kind of wisdom we should have as we live in this world.

We must carry out god's Word and not merely read it -

Chapter 1 v.22: "Do not merely listen to the word and deceive yourselves. DO what it says."

Christians should be those who exhibit real care for others. We need to give practical help to those in need, and we need to be aware of the needs of others -

Chapter 1 v.27: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

Very often the Lord uses thoughtful acts of kindness to stir up interest in the things of God in the people being helped. They feel that because someone has shown them practical kindness, that person's Christianity is something worth knowing about. Practical Christianity can be very fruitful in winning others for the Lord Jesus. Sometimes such acts of kindness may cost us something, but when done in the Name of the Lord and for His sake, we can never be the loser. God always honours those who honour Him.

Chapter 2 v.8-9: "If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbour as yourself', you are doing right. But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as a law-breaker."

Another important point that James makes is that believers must not show favouritism towards other people. Those who are materially rich should not be regarded as superior to those who are poor. We must show equal love and respect to both, for both are precious to the Lord.

Chapter 2 v.14-17: "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed', but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

Genuine Christianity is demonstrated by its practical outreach, and not merely by words spoken. Positive action in doing good is the real evidence of one's faith. It is not enough to go around TALKING about being a Christian, if your life does not exhibit the graciousness of the Lord Jesus in all you do. What we ARE matters tremendously.

Chapter 4 v.7: "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands you sinners, and purify your hearts you double-minded ...humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up."

Christian must keep clear of any involvement with the evil things of this world. We are to be a separated people and to avoid contact with unclean things. By this is meant we must not show any sympathy towards things that are impure or contrary to the Word of God. This is why we must get to know the Scriptures for ourselves so that we know what is right and wrong in the sight of God, and so we can build up our faith in Christ. It is to HIM that we must submit ourselves, and resist every device of Satan to pull us down.

Those who are humbly obedient to the Lord will find that He cares for them, and is ready to guide them daily in every way. Such confidence in the Lord will mean that we can face the future with assurance. It means, too, that we shall commit all our plans to Him, and trust His good hand upon us in leading us day by day.

Chapter 4 v.15: "...you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that'".

In the concluding chapter of this letter, James warns against the deceitfulness of riches. A greed for material wealth can so easily displace faith in the Lord, and harden one's attitude to others. This is clearly a very unchristian situation, and those to whom the Lord has entrusted material wealth must be on their guard. They must be ready to share what God has given them, and must be fair and just in dealing with those whom they employ.

I trust that as you have shared in this consideration of the Letter of James, you will be truly yielded to the Lord Jesus, and will serve him faithfully and practically in your life as a Christian, and so bring glory to Him.