

James 1

by
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Introduction to the Epistle of James

James 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

These devotional studies in the Epistle of James are the result of a twofold desire in the writer's heart. First, I have been looking forward for some time to a closer study of this little book for personal spiritual profit and growth in grace. As a minister of God's Word, I always anticipate passing on to others those lessons learned. Secondly, for some time I have had a growing conviction that this epistle has been greatly neglected. Now if these studies will make any contribution whatever to the spiritual growth of some, or if they will awaken in others an interest in a portion of God's Word that has passed into near-oblivion, I shall consider my effort worthwhile.

Although we praise God for the contributions that have been made to the world through men like Martin Luther, it is to be regretted that his influence upon many has not always been for good. In terming the Book of James "a veritable epistle of straw, and destitute of evangelic character," he is responsible for turning many away from this portion. But the Epistle of James is not an epistle of straw; rather is it an epistle of strength. It is not destitute of evangelic character but rather characteristic of the evangel.

The idea promulgated by Luther that James and Paul are contradictory on the matter of justification is erroneous also. Although Paul wrote that "a man is justified by faith" (Rom. 3:28) and James wrote "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:24), close examination will reveal that rather than being contradictory, each is complementary to the other. Paul deals with the inner faith of man's heart as God sees it, while James concerns his discourse with the outward fruits of faith as man sees them.

God knows whether or not I am a true believer on the basis of my faith apart from any works, but men can only know whether or not I am a true believer as they observe my life outwardly. Jesus said we can distinguish between the true and the false only by a man's fruits (Matt. 7:16, 21).

The theme of this epistle throughout is an extremely practical one, dealing with truth applied and heavenly wisdom resulting in a holy walk. James sounds the much needed and much neglected note which demands conduct conformable to creed, behavior commensurate with belief, and deportment compatible with doctrine. In substance James is appealing for reality in religion.

The rejection of any portion of the Holy Scriptures is dangerous, but it is doubly so when the passages rejected deal with practical holiness before men. The world needs to see a demonstration of God's love and power in Christ's true Church. Satan does all in his power to subdue, and even destroy, such a witness. James, by the Holy Spirit, appeals to every believer to walk holy before God and man. Luther thought he saw a conflict between James and Paul, and in his human reasoning he did the dangerous thing when he rejected James.

The Epistle is the first of seven general or catholic Epistles. The term "catholic" is applied to certain Epistles of the New Testament addressed to groups of churches or Christians in general. The Catholic Epistles are James, First and Second Peter, First, Second, and Third John, and Jude. Two of these authors are Apostles, Peter and John; and two of them are brothers of Jesus. If it were written between 45 and 55 A.D., it would be one of the earliest if not the first book of the New Testament to be written.

The writer of this Epistle, as do Paul, Peter, and Jude, identifies himself immediately as to his name and position, and includes those to whom he addresses himself. The human author of this epistle is easily distinguished from several other New Testament men of the same name. The Scriptures speak of not less than six persons called James. These are: (1) the son of Zebedee (Mark 1:19); (2) the son Alphaeus (Mark 3:18); (3) "James the less" (Mark 15:40); (4) one referred to as one of Jesus' brothers (Mark 6:3); (5) "James the Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:19); and (6) the brother of Jude (Jude 1).

Upon checking the above Scriptures, one can clearly see that these six can actually be reduced to three if we regard two and three as the same person, and four, five, and six as the same person. Three men called James remain; James, the son of Zebedee; James, the son of Alphaeus; and James, the Lord's brother.

Now the question arises as to which of the three wrote the epistle. James the son of Zebedee, the brother of John, could not be the author since he was killed with the sword by Herod before the Epistle was written (Acts 12:2). Some claim that James the son of Alphaeus wrote the Epistle. But how then could he be called the brother of our Lord? The Roman Catholic Church would be inclined to favor James the son of Alphaeus since it would support their invention of the perpetual virginity of Mary.

This writer believes that children were born to Joseph and Mary after the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Luke 2:7 our Lord is spoken of as Mary's first-born son, implying that others might have been born later. Also, the account in Matthew suggests that Joseph and Mary entered into natural marriage relations after the birth of our Lord (Matt. 1:18, 25). We believe that the author of our Epistle was a brother to our Lord, born of Joseph and Mary after the birth of Jesus Christ.

Although James was reared in the same home with the Lord Jesus, James apparently did not become a believer until after Jesus arose from death and the grave. Even after our Lord began His public ministry, John wrote: "For neither did His brethren believe in Him" (John 7:5). Again Paul indicated in his letter to the Corinthians: "He rose again the third day . . . After that, He was seen of James; then of all the apostles" (1 Cor. 15:4, 7).

Most important of all, however, is the fact that James, the brother of Jesus Christ, did come to believe that Jesus was the Son of God; he did appropriate Christ's Gospel; he did grow in grace, even the knowledge of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; and he later was recognized as a leader in the Church at Jerusalem. James indeed spoke with authority and spiritual discernment at the Church Council, and that to the pleasure and satisfaction of the apostles and elders (Acts 15:13-22).

"A servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." Like Paul (Rom. 1:1; Titus 1:1) and Peter (2 Peter 1:1), James refers to himself, not as an apostle, but as a bondsman. The word "servant" denotes this. Any truly great man of God, regardless of how high his position in the church, regards himself as a servant of Christ.

The step from darkness to light is a transfer from slavery to Satan and sin to bond-slavery to Jesus Christ. In the redemptive process the enslaved victim is purchased by Jesus Christ from the slave market of sin to become the possession of the Purchaser. "Ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). "Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men" (1 Cor. 7:23). Our redemption included deliverance from the bitter bondage of sin into the blessed bondage of the Saviour.

Since the Son has made us free from Satan we are free indeed (John 8:36) to serve our Saviour. Peter describes this as the position of every true believer when he writes: "As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God" (1 Peter 2:16).

J. Nieboer tells the following story to illustrate the attitude of a willing slave. The incident took place at a slave auction in the Southland during the days of slavery. A fine-looking young man was placed on the block for sale. Among the interested bidders was an Englishman who outbid a number of other interested buyers. When the deal was finally consummated, the young slave chided his purchaser for buying a slave when slavery was already abolished in England. To the young man's chiding the purchaser replied: "I have bought you to set you free." Overcome with emotion, the slave said: "Sir, I will be your willing slave forever."

Oh, my dear Christian friend, now that Christ has set us free from sin's bondage, who among us would not gladly be His bondsman forever? Let us recognize anew our position as servants "of the Lord Jesus Christ" and rejoice in this blessed servitude!

A servant of God must of necessity be a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. As Christ's true servant James testifies to the deity of the Son of God (1:1, 2:1). He sees the Father and the Son co-equal with each other. The self-styled "Jehovah's Witnesses" who deny the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ are in reality the emissaries of Satan. Our Lord said: "All men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent Him" (John 5:23). Later He added: "If God were your Father, ye would love Me" (John 8:42), and "He that hateth Me hateth My Father also" (John 15:23). John by the Holy Spirit writes: "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father" (1 John 2:23). Let us never fail to acknowledge the Lordship of Mary's Son who is in reality the anointed Son of God. The measure of our love for Him determines the measure of our love for the Father who sent him.

The epistle was written in the primary sense "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." At the time of writing it would seem that James had a special burden for the dispersed Jews. There were many Jewish Christians who were scattered through persecution.

In comparison to the often-used phrase "the ten lost tribes," this reference to "the twelve tribes" holds special interest, some having gone so far as to attempt to identify the "ten lost tribes" as the British people. As for this writer, the theory of British Israelism has been satisfactorily disproved. Moreover, the Bible speaks nowhere of "the lost tribes." While a man's identity may not be known to himself, it is still known fully to God. When our Lord returns to earth again, the twelve different tribes shall once more be known to all. He shall bring them together (Rev. 7:4-8).

The scattering of the Jews was not only known to God but predicted by God from the beginning. God had told His people: "I will scatter you among the nations" (Lev. 26:33). This scattering commenced when the ten tribes were carried away into Assyrian captivity about 740 B.C. and it has continued down through the centuries. It is generally conceded that the infiltration of Jews in every country has added to the advancement of civilization throughout the known world. God has used the scattering for the good of humanity.

This principle of scattering helped spread the Gospel in the early Church. Luke reminds us that "at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1). "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the Word" (Act 8:4). When God

permitted the scattering of His children at that time it was for the purpose of reaching the unreached with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Certainly we cannot think for a moment that God had forsaken them nor that He had lost track of them. No, never! He knew each one by name as well as the whereabouts of each, just as He possesses full knowledge of each child of His today. At the Rapture of the Church He will gather the redeemed of the Church Age unto Himself even as He will gather the twelve tribes when Christ returns to earth.

The heart passion of James for the Jewish Christians all over the world should be ours for the whole Body of Jesus Christ, His Church, on earth whether visible or invisible.

Patience Through Tribulation

James 1:2-4 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; 3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. 4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

We proceed now to the very heart of the Epistle.

This first major lesson with which James deals: namely, Patience Through Tribulation, is a paradox to every unregenerated man, and even strange to the Christian not well taught in the Word. It is to Christians that James addresses this message, calling them "My brethren." The term is used here not in a national sense but in a spiritual one. All true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ have God as their Father and are therefore brethren. Obviously it is one of the favorite expressions of James, for he uses it not less than seventeen times(1:2,9,16,19; 2:1,5,14,15; 3:1,10,12; 4:11; 5:7,9,10,12,19).

To his persecuted and dispersed brethren in Christ, the author writes: "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." The word "temptations" here means "trials" or "tests" with no thought whatever of solicitation to do wrong. James teaches us that tribulation is one of the tests of faith. Our Lord spoke of His trials (Luke 22:28), as did also Paul (Acts 20:18, 19). Peter likewise wrote of "heaviness through manifold temptations [or testings]" (1 Peter 1:6). The believer's trials are said, then, to be "divers" (varied) and manifold (many).

That a child of God should have to pass through many and various trials has been difficult for some Christians to accept. In my experiences as a pastor I receive not a few inquires on this very problem. Possibly some people have misunderstood, feeling that the Christian is expected to count pain and sorrow as good things in themselves and therefore a source of joy. I do not believe this to be the meaning in the statement James makes. Elsewhere in Scripture we are told that "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous . . ." (Heb.12:11). But then we are not living merely for the "present." For each of us there is the "afterward," the future prospect, and "it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

Who among us would not be glad if the fruits of affliction could be produced by some experience of a more pleasant nature? But not one of us has any right to question God's methods in producing His desired fruits. He knows that the bitter agonies of sorrow and suffering are needed to conquer sin. It was through the agony of His own soul and the shame and suffering of His Holy Son that the sin question was satisfactorily dealt with at Calvary.

Herein lies the victory: it is possible to rejoice in the trial. Of our Lord Jesus Christ it is written, "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame . . ." (Heb. 12:2). This was the experience of many in the early church. Peter and the other Apostles turned from their persecutors "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41). It is possible for one to obey this Spirit-directed admonition of James.

Although it may be an unusual perspective, it is true nevertheless that nothing but divine love sends trouble to the child of God, "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Heb. 12:6). When, in the first shocking moment, I look my trouble in the face, it is hard for me to recognize any blessing in it. Usually I count it all joy when I escape trials and tribulations. How do you react to trouble? Do you ever think of a heavy burden or affliction someone carries, and then thank God that you have been delivered? Of such an experience, Charles Brown says: "It is just possible--according to James--that they are to be envied and we to be pitied." James appeals to us to recognize that every test, every trial, every tribulation, with all the accompanying sorrow and disappointment, is a God-given opportunity for growth and development in the Christian life.

My brother in Christ, Richard H. Seume, inserted the following clipping in his *Studies in James*. I beg his patience with me as I quote it here. It is entitled: "The Blessing of Irritations."

"Life on earth would not worth much if every source of irritation were removed. Yet most of us rebel against the things that irritate us, and count as heavy loss what ought to be rich gain. We are told that the oyster is wiser; that when an irritating object, like a bit of sand, gets under the 'mantle' of his shell, he simply covers it with the most precious part of his being and makes of it a pearl. The irritation that it was causing is stopped by encrusting it with the pearly formation. A true pearl is therefore simply a VICTORY over irritation. Every irritation that gets into our lives today is an opportunity for pearl culture. The more irritations the devil flings at us, the more pearls we may have. We need only to welcome them and cover them completely with love, that most precious part of us, and the irritation will be smothered out as the pearl comes into being. What a store of pearls we may have, if we will!"

Trials are not a sign of God's displeasure, for the Apostle Peter tells us that we are not to think it strange when some trial comes to test us as though some strange thing happened to us (1 Peter 4:12). The Lord Jesus said: "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33). Beloved, if we know these things we will not be caught unguarded when trials come.

Remember, all things, even our sorest troubles, work together for good to them that love God (Romans 8:28). Failing to reckon upon this and becoming disconsolate and discouraged under trial brings no glory to God. Moreover, a grumbler places his own limits on his usefulness in the service of the Lord. Joy is contagious, and joy under fire brings blessing to others.

The world will not understand our joy in the midst of tribulation, but they certainly should see it. Poor Elijah! When he fled from Jezebel, sat under the juniper tree, and requested to die, he had no testimony before God or man (1 Kings 19:4). On the other hand, when Paul and Silas were chained in prison they counted it all joy even though their backs bled from the beatings and their feet were held fast in stocks. They sang praises and prayed to God, and in the midst of rejoicing in tribulation they led an entire family to Jesus Christ (Acts 16:23-33). After such an experience Paul could say to others: "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say Rejoice" (Phil. 4:4).

In verse three James continues with a reason why the believer is to count it all joy when adversities come to him. The reason? "Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience." Ah, the test of faith then is something that works. It produces something, and that something is the much needed patience which is obviously lacking in most of us. Keep in mind the fact that James, throughout his Epistle, is pleading for a belief that behaves, a faith that is followed by fruit. Now the presence of patience in one who is being tested is no proof that such a one is saved; but, contrariwise, where there is a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, patience should be manifest at all times. Where patience is lacking in one of His children, God has a working remedy--"the trying of your faith."

Rejoice, not because trials come, but because of their possible benefits. James says that our trials may produce patience in this life; Peter adds that trials produce praise at the appearing of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:7). Patience before men, and praise before God--what a blessed combination! But beware lest the trial of our faith should work impatience, for then a beautiful thing is lost in this life and there shall be no praise of our Lord in the life to come. Where faith is genuine, tribulation will only increase one's perseverance, for "tribulation worketh patience" (Rom 5:3). A trial is not something to be tolerated but a trust to be treasured.

Patience is a virtue that aids in developing Christian character. In a true sense it is the quietness or self-possession of one's own spirit in resignation to God's will. But this is only one aspect of its meaning. Patience is also positive and aggressive; it sees a divinely set goal and with determined perseverance pursues it. Paul expressed this positive aspect of it when he testified: "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). Paul's will was submissive to God's will whenever the Apostle was called to suffer and in this he displayed a passive patience; but his life was marked also by a progressive, persevering patience, and the latter was developed by the former. Tribulation led Paul to trust more and try harder. It settled him into sweet acquiescence on the one hand and stirred action on the other. In every trial God is working to perfect patience.

G. Coleman Luck, in his fine little book (#251. Moody Colportage Library), tells how a young minister, realizing he lacked patience, once asked an older man of God to pray that he might have more patience. The aged man knelt beside his younger brother in the Lord and began to pray that God would send trouble and difficulties upon the youth. After a while the younger brother tapped the older minister upon the shoulder and whispered: "You must have misunderstood me; I asked that you would pray that I might have more patience, not more trouble." The older man replied: "The Scripture says: 'Tribulation worketh patience.' That is the only way!"

Since all the foregoing is true, namely, that our heavenly Father uses tribulation in the lives of His children in order to produce patience, and it is likewise true that we "have need of patience" (Heb. 10:36), the next word from James demands our careful attention. He adds: "But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (verse 4). Williams translates this verse to read: "But you must let your endurance come to its perfect product, so that you may be fully developed and perfectly equipped." Do not give up but persevere until you are certain that God has perfected in you that virtue which needs His cultivation. God wants each of us who is His child to be full grown, mature, lacking in no spiritual thing.

Have you a desire to grow up into Jesus Christ? Does your heart yearn to be conformed to His image? In order for this to be accomplished in your life God asks for complete surrender to His will.

God's goal for us, completeness with nothing lacking, is expressed in the word "perfect" and the Holy Spirit will use every trial accepted in the right Scriptural sense to produce in us a maturity of Christian character.

"Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him" (Psalm 37:7). Sooner or later your trial will come to an end; and remember, "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).

Before ending this meditation on *Patience Through Tribulation*, I am led to comment on verse twelve since it is a necessary part of our theme. "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 who love Him" (1:12). The word "temptation" in this verse means the same as in verse two, not a solicitation to do wrong as in verse thirteen, but "trial" or "testing." Verse twelve sums up the matter of patient endurance under trial in that it promises a reward for all who endure trial. That reward is "the crown of life." Although God will reward the faithful pastor, soul winner, teacher, and evangelist, He has a special reward ready for the patient sufferer. I am sure that this crown will be given to some whose names are not known beyond the bounds of their own circle of family and friends, possibly some blind, some paralyzed, some shut-in with an incurable disease, some husband or wife who endured the trials brought on by the persecution of an unbelieving mate, yes, and a host of others whose trials are not known to any but God and themselves.

Do we love Him, our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? If we do, we will endure every trial for His sake, and when He comes for us He will bring the reward with him--"the crown of life."

(For a study on the other crowns mentioned in the Bible, see the author's book, *We Live Forever*.)

Wisdom Through Prayer

James 1:5-8 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. 6 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. 7 For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. 8 A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

James now takes up the subject matter of his second lesson: namely, wisdom. In the first lesson (verses 2-4) we learned that patience is obtained through trial. In this second lesson (verses 5-8) we are to learn that wisdom is obtained through prayer. The second lesson is closely related to the first since there is no greater need for wisdom than when one is passing through some deep trial of affliction. It is difficult to act wisely when we have been wronged or when we are suffering.

Wisdom is discernment and judgment and dexterity in the application of knowledge already gained, not only in the arts and sciences but also in the Scriptures. One may have acquired vast knowledge but lack wisdom. Wisdom does not concern itself with theories and ideas but with suiting the right means to the right end. Knowledge becomes baggage when we lack the faculty of using it to attain perfect and right goals. Wisdom does the right thing in the right way and is certainly one of the most needed but grandest of virtues.

The outstanding characteristic of this generation is the absence of true wisdom. This may offend the more highly educated. We have never had more college graduates and never more educated ignorance. Through knowledge man has learned to travel faster than sound but shows his lack of wisdom by going faster in the wrong direction. Through knowledge we have accumulated piles of information about the world we live in, but show our lack of wisdom by not learning any better how to live in the world.

It is a bad thing when a man lacks wisdom, but it is far worse when that man is so wise in his own conceit that he rejects the true wisdom which comes from God. Some men are born with an alacrity to grasp knowledge, but when that knowledge is set against God and His Word, those men become dangerous.

James says: "If any [man] of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God." We Christians cannot afford to make decisions on our own. God knows what is best for His children, and we need to come humbly requesting wisdom for every issue of life. After all, God's will is best for us.

When we need understanding we must ask God to enlighten us. A multitude of situations arise in which we become conscious that we "lack wisdom." Our brethren in Christ may offer us good advice, but before we go to them we should "ask of God." Solomon asked, praying: "O Lord my God . . . Give . . . Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people, that I may discern between good and bad . . . And God said unto him . . . Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart" (1 Kings 3:7-12). What God did for Solomon He will do for any of His children. Let a Christian ask God for wisdom to do the right thing and not the wrong, and he can be certain of that prayer being answered.

Doubtless many believers among us desire the wisdom of God but do not know how to go about getting it. There is a proverb which says: "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting, get understanding" (Prov.4:7). The Bible tells us what things we are to seek after and how we are to go about getting them. In the matter of wisdom it is given to those of God's children who ask for it. James says: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God." Here is a simple definition of prayer: a definite request for something which we lack, and that something is wisdom.

Look with me at a significant verse from one of the Psalms. The Psalmist writes: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111:10). If we want to understand the will of God, it is of the utmost importance that we be right with God Himself. The person who has no respect nor reverence for God is anything but wise. This verse shows us the test of common sense.

Wisdom, no matter how high or perfect, has its roots in submissiveness to the laws of God. Only a fool denies or defies God. A Plato, an Aristotle, a Socrates, a Tacitus may accumulate vast knowledge and seek to know wisdom, but until the philosopher bows in humble reverence before the sovereign God, he knows not anything. An Einstein may be a genius in mathematics, but without God in his life he must go on the records as a man without wisdom. And permit me here to tell you that he was exactly just that. At a conference attended by outstanding churchmen and scientists, a paper was read from Albert Einstein in which he said: "In their struggle for the ethical good, teachers of religion must have the stature to give up the doctrine of a personal god." Let the Word of God answer the like of Einstein: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Psalm 14:1).

Job raised the question, "But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?" (Job 28:12). The remainder of the chapter answers this universal question. Wisdom is not found in the land of the living (verse 13) nor in the depth of the sea (verse 14); it cannot be purchased with the gold of Ophir (verses 15, 16) nor with the precious stones of the earth, "for the price of wisdom is above rubies" (verses 17-19). Then God answered the quest of His child, "And unto man He said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding" (verse 28).

God is the Author and the source of all wisdom. He planned the universe and man. He alone knows the intricate workings of all things, and His wisdom He gives only to those who fear Him. A man may look deeply into science and philosophy for true wisdom, but he will look in vain. Joseph was a prisoner in Egypt, yet because he feared God he was possessed of a wisdom greater

by far than that of the wise men and astrologers of Egypt. Daniel was a captive in Babylon, yet he could advise the king and Babylon's wisest of worldly-wise men, because he feared God. Paul was a prisoner in chains, yet he could advise the navigators on the sea better than they knew themselves, because he feared God. Most certainly the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Shut out God from your life and you list yourself among the fools.

Look now at the process by which God imparts His perfect wisdom to man. We would miss a great deal in our study on wisdom if we failed to look at a New Testament classic which contrasts worldly wisdom with divine wisdom. I am thinking of Paul's record in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, where God says: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent" (verse 19).

Whenever a man like Einstein chooses to stand with the philosophical thought that denies God, he places himself on the side that cannot win. If men like Einstein had pure and perfect wisdom, why did not God choose such men as His servants and messengers? Verse 20 asks: "Where is the wise [the thinker]? Where is the scribe [the writer]? Where is the disputer [the speaker]?" Not one man, regardless of how able a thinker, writer, or speaker he might be, has ever been called of God to speak or write for Him if he did not reverently fear God. God completely bypasses the worldly-wise man who denies Him, since, by divine decrees, the world through its own wisdom cannot know God (verse 21). God rejects the wisdom of this world and employs the foolishness of preaching to save men: "Because the foolishness of God [in man's estimate] is wiser than men; and the weakness of God [in man's estimate] is stronger than men" (verse 25).

Now in verse 30 we come to the contrast between the wise and the strong in human sight and the wise and strong in God's sight. "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (verse 30). Since Christ is God manifest in the flesh, He is the perfect expression of the divine attribute of wisdom, and the moment a man exercises saving faith in Jesus Christ he is in touch with true wisdom.

The divinely appointed starting place, then, is the believing sinner's contact with the Lord of Wisdom at this meeting place. Things which, without Him, are impossible to procure are made available through Christ. One of these is wisdom. The Christian does not obtain his wisdom from men like Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Einstein, or some other philosopher or scientist of renown, but from the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus Christ is made unto every believer "wisdom." Even as the origin of our union with Christ is of God, so in its effect, Christ is made unto us all that God is. Here its effect is stated as wisdom. Union with the Lord Jesus Christ makes the believer truly wise.

Most men whom God has used have been men from the common walks of life, men who believed in Jesus Christ and were empowered by the Holy Spirit to do great works for Him. Occasionally God saved and used someone who would have made his mark among the people of his day, but such were in the minority. Paul was one of them. He later wrote: "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called" (verse 26). But God is choosing and using humble men to whom He can speak and impart divine wisdom for every emergency in this life. By relegating the wisdom of men to its insignificant place, God elevates to its rightful high position a simple trust in His Son.

Moreover, God giveth "liberally." God's liberality is seen on every hand. We have more of most things than we actually need. I know a dear saint of God who enjoys a measure of health and happiness, yet she has had seven major operations which necessitated the removal of one lung, one kidney, one breast, a part of the intestine, and the appendix.

God is equally liberal in giving spiritual gifts to those who ask. If you ask for wisdom in order that you may do right, you can expect God to give liberally of His wisdom.

And you may rest assured He will not upbraid you. He "upbraideth not." Men may scold us when we ask of them, but God, never. You will never hear God say to you, "You made your bed, so lie in it." A little lad of ten years asked his father twice in one evening for information concerning a problem in arithmetic. The father, a bit annoyed, replied: "Use your own common sense and figure it out for yourself." Our heavenly Father never upbraids his children in such fashion. He giveth freely. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things."

Possibly at some time in your life you have asked direction but did not feel that God actually gave you that wisdom for which you sought. James deals in part with this problem of unanswered prayer. He adds: "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. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord" (verses 6, 7).

What earthly parent does not want the confidence and faith of his children? Just as any mother and father would be displeased should the children show lack of faith in them, so "without faith it is impossible to please Him [God]" (Heb. 11:6). God has decreed that faith is an essential requisite to answered prayer. "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matt. 21:22). "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24).

While God will not upbraid His children for asking, we have one instance on record where our risen Lord met with His disciples "and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen Him after He was risen" (Mark 16:14). We cannot expect to claim the promise in verse five if we are guilty of doubt as spoken of in verse six. We must "ask in faith."

There are reasons, other than unbelief, why our prayers are not answered, but they cannot be listed at this time. Suffice it to say, "If we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us" (1 John 5:14).

Only God is completely trustworthy. Each one of us has at some time put faith in some person who has failed us, but God has never proved unfaithful to any one of us.

The word "wavering" in verse six is rendered "doubting." No Christian is more restless than when he is wavering. Like the billows of the sea driven with the wind and tossed, he is never settled, now in the depths and then on the heights, never unswerving. Like a vessel, tossed about, driven here and there, seeking advice first from this person, then another, he falls an easy prey to false teachers. Such restless Christians are "carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14). The doubter receives much, and often confusing, advice from men, but, as verse seven tells us, he never receives anything from the Lord.

Oh, dear Christians, why do we doubt? Actually we have no reason for doing so. Do we believe that God possesses all wisdom, including that which we need? Do we believe He is able to impart His wisdom to us at all times? If we do, then why should we doubt? Let us come to our heavenly Father with believing hearts and count on His wisdom for life's every experience.

Riches Through Poverty

James 1:9-11 Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: 10 But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. 11 For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

Forming another strange paradox, these three verses speak simultaneously of poverty and wealth, the two extremes of life, and how the true child of God should face each of them. In case God will permit some of us to prosper in this world, let us stir ourselves to learn what our attitude toward worldly possessions ought to be. Contrariwise, the right attitude is likewise important in that you may be one whom God will never permit to accumulate this world's goods.

Before we look at these conditions separately let us examine them briefly together. In both, the believer is exhorted to rejoice, and the reasons are given; but that in which one is to rejoice is directly opposite from that in which the other is to rejoice. The Christian of low degree is to rejoice in that he is exalted, but the rich, in that he is made low. Strange language, this! But the Bible contains other paradoxes equally as strange to the natural mind:

"As deceivers, and yet true; As unknown, and yet well known; As dying, and, behold, we live; As chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; As poor, yet making many rich; As having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Cor. 6:8-10).

"When I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. 12:10).

"He that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Matt. 23:11, 12).

James is telling us in verse nine that the brother of low degree is to rejoice in that he is exalted. Most professing Christians of my acquaintance complain if they cannot get ahead. Now why do we do this? Simply because we have lost sight of our real calling and dignity in Christ. A Christian who is lacking in material things has undiminishing possessions in Jesus Christ.

The "low degree" of which James writes is human appraisal; in Christ the believer possesses more than the wealthiest of this world without Christ. A Christian may be of inferior degree financially, socially, or racially; but he need not be moved by his standing according to man's standard. God's standard does not go by one's place, or face, or race in this life. Every saved person can rejoice because his name is written in heaven (Luke 10:20). Beloved child of God, "ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood . . ." (1 Peter 2:9). We are of God's royal family and therefore heirs of His kingdom. Beware lest any trial of poverty work a moral injury upon us.

I am willing to concede that, for my part, I have found it easier in the past to rejoice when wealth comes than when it goes. And I confess that this failure was the result of a worse failure: namely, the inexcusable ignorance of my position and possessions in Jesus Christ. The "brother of low degree," that is, the person of humble position in this life, should rejoice in the elevated position to which the grace of God has brought him.

No man comes too poor for the Lord Jesus to save. He said: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath appointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor . . ." (Luke 4:18). The Gospel invitation says: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa. 55:1).

You see, the gospel of the grace of God has a leveling effect. To a poor blind beggar our Lord said: "Arise." To rich Zacchaeus He said: "Come down." "The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less" (Exod. 30:15). This was the law of God concerning the ransom of souls in the Old Testament times.

The moment a believing sinner trusts Jesus Christ for salvation he becomes God's child, "And if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together" (Rom. 8:17). The poor in this world's goods who trust in Jesus Christ have a standing before God equal to the richest saints. The redemption price for the poor man's soul was just as great as that for the wealthiest sinner, not ". . . silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18, 19).

Dear brother or sister in Christ, the work you can do for God is just as necessary and fruit-bearing as that of the rich man, possibly more so. God needs someone to do the common tasks. All of us cannot afford to pay others to do the lesser tasks in the Lord's work. I know a wealthy Christian who will never soil his hands if he can avoid it. In a community door-to-door canvass for the purpose of distributing Gospel literature, he will assist in the purchase of tracts and even pay someone to distribute them, but he himself has never been known to assist personally in the actual work. We do not pass judgment; we illustrate. Let the brother of low degree rejoice that God has counted him worthy to serve in any capacity, whether it be cleaning the church building, passing out tracts, or ministering to the poor. The lowliest servant of Jesus Christ is an honored and exalted saint in God's eyes.

Many lowly men, poor in this world's goods, have been exalted by God above the rich in this life. A maintenance worker in a factory, a devoted Christian and respected deacon in the local church, invited the factory superintendent to attend services on the Lord's day. The prosperous employer accepted the invitation, and upon attending the worship service, saw his laboring employee occupying an exalted position of officiating minister at the Lord's table. It is not uncommon to see a servant in this world exalted above his master in spiritual matters.

Before examining James's comment of the rich man I feel constrained to look at two passages dealing with our Lord Jesus Christ, who said: "I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29). We read: "He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:8, 9). Give thought to it! The royal Son of God stripped Himself of the glory of His majesty and voluntarily became the Father's bond-slave. Yes, and ours. He said: "I am among you as He that serveth" (Luke 22:27). He served God well, and us, when He "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Notice, humbled Himself, but He did not exalt Himself. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him." For the Lord of glory the way up was down. And it is the way for each of us. "Let this mind be in you." J.H. Pickford writes: "This pattern of Jesus leaves us no choice; we must be God's nothings if God is going to do something through us. Let us step down from the throne of self and He will exalt us in due time." "Let the brother of low degree rejoice."

Poverty can produce great riches according to 2 Corinthians 8:9: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." This verse is closely related in meaning to the passage just considered in Philippians. Had he remained in heaven our blessed Lord would not have made many rich, but in coming He brought to every needy sinner God's riches--"the riches of His goodness" (Rom. 2:4), "the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7), and the "riches of His glory" (Eph. 3:16). He descended so low and gave so freely that He exhausted Himself and impoverished Himself of all His riches. But nothing was lost. We have been the recipients of all He relinquished. This is the strange paradox of obtaining riches through poverty.

The believer's wealth can never be calculated in dollars. We are rich in peace, righteousness, and hope; and neither adversity nor ill-health can take such wealth away from us. It is all because He became poor. "Let the brother of low degree rejoice."

James turns now to the rich: "But the rich, in that he is made low." This thought borders on contempt of wealth. James warns the rich man throughout the Epistle (2:2-6; 5:1-6). Somehow I cannot bring myself to disagree with James, since the perils of wealth are quite obvious.

Paul writes: "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17). But let the Bible speak about wealth and the wealthy. One of the snares into which the wealthy fall so often is their confidence in their riches rather than in the Lord, so that they become possessed by their possessions.

Wealth makes it difficult for a man to humble himself; it makes him a target for Satan to attack with pride and a sense of superiority. If any read these lines who are rich in this world's goods, remember that you have nothing you did not receive. Everything you possess came by the mercy of God. I warn you not to trust in your riches. They are uncertain. What you have today may be gone tomorrow. "Riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle" (Prov. 23:5). Our Lord said: "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:23)! Few rich people are sufficiently humbled to be saved. A rich young man had come to Christ in quest of eternal life. He had inherited wealth but not eternal salvation. What he possessed was only temporal and he knew it. The Lord put him to the test to see if he was willing to lay aside his temporal goods to get eternal life. But the young man was sad and went away grieved, "for he had great possessions" (verse 22). Then Jesus, taking in the entire glance, said: "With what difficulty shall they who have riches enter into the kingdom of God!"

Satan places many varied barriers in the way of all who would be saved. In this instance the barrier was money. Then our Lord added: "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." Our Lord does not declare it impossible for a wealthy person to be saved, but He is stating that it is difficult to get him saved. The hyperbole of the camel and the needle's eye teaches that he whose love of riches keeps him from submitting trustfully to Jesus Christ cannot be saved.

Another Biblical example of the teaching of James is to be found in our Lord's account of the rich man and the beggar (Luke 16:19-31). The poor beggar named Lazarus died, and his soul was carried by the angels of God to be with the believing dead who had died in the Lord, not because he was poor but rather because he was a believer. The rich man died also and went to hell and conscious torment, not because he was rich, but because he would not believe. With great difficulty does a man with riches enter into the kingdom of God.

Returning now to James we hear him speak to the wealthy believer telling him to rejoice "in that he is made low." For a Jew to accept Jesus Christ meant that he would be dispossessed of any and all inheritance, cut off completely from loved ones as though he were dead. Such practice is not uncommon in our day. Paul testified: "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3:8). The mighty Saul of Tarsus was brought low; but he rejoiced, for in losing any earthly prestige and possessions, he gained eternal riches in Jesus Christ.

When a wealthy person becomes saved, he, like any other Christian, is called to a life of separation. He does not at once step out of a wealthy class of the unsaved into a wealthy class of saved persons. If his heart is right with God, he discovers that in Christ he is no higher than the poorest of his brethren in Christ.

Now why should the rich man rejoice in that he is made low? "Because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away." When death comes he will be as the poor man. Both must leave everything behind when that last hour strikes. A lovely flower does not bloom forever, for its life and loveliness are soon gone. It is beautiful while it lasts but its life span is short. Riches may be useful in this life, but death severs a man and his wealth forever. Let the rich Christian rejoice in his eternal wealth in Christ only.

Since James will have more in his Epistle to say about money, let us conclude with a comment on verse 11. He writes: "For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways." As grass and flowers scorched and wilted by a hot, dry wind (see Jonah 4:8; Matt. 13:6; Luke 12:55), so will the rich man and his riches fade away from this earthly scene.

There is a way which seemeth right unto man and with many it is the way of accumulating wealth, but the one who pursues that way must "fade away" in his purposes and pursuits to get richer. As the sweetness and beauty go from a fading flower, so is the wretched end of the rich man who forgets God. His plans and projects go unfinished. His hopes perish. The true child of God possesses an inheritance "incorruptible, and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven" (1 Peter 1:4). The rich man as a rich man, fades away as do his riches; the Christian, as a Christian, and his inheritance never fade. Life at its best is brief and uncertain. "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for Him hath God the Father sealed" (John 6:27).

Sin Through Lust and Lure

James 1:13-14 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither he any man: 14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

These two verses take up an important theological question: namely, the origin of sin with the human race. James commences with the emphatic admonition that no man is ever to blame God when he is tempted to do wrong. If he should ever entertain such a thought, let him never say it. The tempting here, unlike that in verse 2, speaks of the solicitation of man to do evil. Now there have been those religious leaders who reasoned that since God permitted man to be in such a circumstance where he was exposed to temptation to do wrong, God was the author of the sin to which those circumstances had led. James warns us never to say such a thing.

Doing the very thing that we are warned here not to do is common among us all. For example, we excuse our wrongdoing on the ground of some inheritance or environment which we reason to be related to the providence of God, which we therefore conclude must of necessity come from God. It was this very reasoning to which our first parents resorted after the fall and it comes only from an unregenerate or carnal mind. Adam sought to excuse himself when he said to God: "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (Gen. 3:12). Did not God give him the woman who gave him the forbidden fruit? In its finality he was blaming God for his sin.

The one restriction that God had placed upon our first parents was reasonable, being a test of their faith and obedience, not a temptation to do wrong. The power of choice lay with them, and they had as much power to choose the good as they had to choose the evil. God did not compel Adam and Eve to eat the fruit; He forbade them, and yet Adam sought to blame the Lord.

A look at the Scriptures and then at the world shows us that man is not what his Creator intended him to be. Man is far from what he was when he came from the hands of his Creator. Are we to assume then that man sinned because he was made of defective material? No, never! "God created man in His own image . . . and God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:27, 31). Adam was created a righteous and holy being and placed in a perfect environment entirely suited to his nature, so that he could not blame God for defection in himself or in his environment.

"God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man." It is unreasonable to conceive how any one who has not been first tempted himself by evil could tempt another to do evil. It would seem that a man who would shrink from the thought of God's doing evil must shrink also from the thought of His tempting man to do evil. He who is in perfect righteousness and holiness cannot be the originator of sin. A tempter to sin must be himself open to sin's temptations. God cannot be thus tempted. No man is ever driven to sin by the circumstances in which God has placed him. The drunkard cannot blame his drunkenness on the associates who gave him his first drink. Let us never excuse our wrongdoing by blaming the providence of God. There is absolutely nothing in the divine nature that responds to evil. God is righteous, hence He leads only in paths of righteousness. (Psalm 23:3).

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the God-Man, proved He could not be tempted to do evil, and Satan calculated wrong when he figured that Jesus Christ the Man could be tempted to sin. Not one of Satan's offers appeals to our Lord Jesus Christ who "knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21); He was "without sin" (Heb. 4:15); "separate from sinners" (Heb. 7:26); and "in Him is no sin" (1 John 3:5).

How then did sin enter the human race? James gives a reasonable and satisfying answer twofold in content. Temptation is both internal and external. Temptation may come from within when a man "is drawn away of his own lust," and it may come from without when he is "enticed." From within it is lust; without it is lure.

Temptation is traced first to our lusts, or desires. Where there is no desire there is no temptation. Not all persons have the same evil desires. An evil which may be desirable to one person may be repulsive to another. We are sometimes critical of others who have evil desires which may not bother us forgetting that we have evil desires which may not appeal to them.

We do not always have an opportunity to fulfill our wrong desires; but when the opportunity does come, the real temptation comes also. God does not hold us chargeable when a desire to do wrong arises within, but we are answerable when that desire breaks through every barrier and takes advantage of the opportunity to sin.

Man's sinful, fallen nature is bent to do evil. We are shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin (Psalm 51:5). Thoughts and acts of sin spring from a principle of sin nature. The human heart is naturally deceitful and sick (Jer. 17:9), and out of it come forth evil thoughts (Matt. 15:19). A corrupt tree can only bring forth evil fruit (Matt. 7:17, 18). We all must agree with Paul where he says: "Sin . . . dwelleth in me" (Rom. 7:17). "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

How such an evil bent came to be is not our problem here. Frankly, its origin does not matter. All desire to do wrong grows out of a depravity within man. Sin is not eternal, but it originated in the human race in the free act of Adam. Through one sin of this one man, Adam, a sinful nature is imputed to all of Adam's posterity, since he is the federal head and representative race. Every man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires.

James also deals with the external allurements to do wrong in this use of the words “and enticed.” The flesh with its evil desires is the internal foe; Satan with his enticements is the external foe. The believer must be on guard at all times. A fifth column operates from within while the enemy solicits from without. Our Lord said to His own: “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:41).

Were it not for our desires within, Satan could never gain a victory over us by his enticements. Our Lord was enticed by Satan to sin, but Christ could not fall prey to Satan's enticements since He had no lust within. The Scripture says that He “was in all points tempted like as we are yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). This meant that He was tempted in all points like ourselves, apart from indwelling sin. He was solicited to sin by Satan and the Scribes and Pharisees, but He did not submit to speak or act wrongly, because He could not. He revolted against sin and rejected every offer to commit sin because there was nothing carnal in Him to respond to temptation. His temptations never sprang, as in our case, from any sinful desire on His part. The temptations, or enticements, from without left His sinless nature undisturbed and unscarred.

Satan can break through the defense of a fallen sinner, but he could break through our perfect Savior never. We are not suggesting that our Lord Jesus was able not to sin, but that He was not able to sin. There never was any inclination in Christ to do any of the wrong things He was tempted to do. It is the sinner, therefore, who needs the help.

Viewing the awful consequences of sin which James clearly states, and which we shall take up in our next study, we should come to our “great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God” (Heb. 4:14). He is able to sympathize. Mark well, He does not sympathize with our sins. We need never look to Him for sympathy if we yield to sin. True, Christ is our judicial advocate with the Father if we do sin (1 John 2:1), and “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). But having been attacked from without by Satan, and thus having passed through the path of temptation, He feels for us. The Scripture says He is “touched.” What tenderness! What compassion! He knows what it means to be tempted. He understands the fierceness of Satan's attacks.

“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. 4:16). Are you being tempted from within or enticed from without? Come to the Saviour! Confess all to Him now. As we watch and pray at the throne of grace we shall not yield to temptation. If you have yielded to temptation, you need mercy; if you confess your sin to Him, divine mercy will be extended to you. If you are being tempted, you need grace to resist evil, and as you come to Him grace will be extended to you. He hates the sin but loves the sinner. While there is still time, and before it is too late, “let us come.”

Death Through Sin

James 1:15-17 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. 16 Do not err, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

Having dealt with the causes of sin in verses 13 and 14, James continues with the all-important subject of the inevitable consequences of sin namely, death. If we fail to come to God's throne of grace in the moment of temptation, but instead yield to some evil desire, "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin." And lest any one should minimize sin, as many do, the apostle wants all to know the progress of sin. He traces it quite simply: lust--sin--death.

Any act of sin, which is any transgression against the holiness and the laws of God, must run its natural course--it "bringeth forth death." The sin does not end with the speaking of an evil word or the committing of an evil deed. It must of necessity yield its inevitable fruit. So say the laws of God, and no man has ever dared to defy those laws and prove them inoperative. Death follows sin as naturally, and by as perpetual and permanent a law, as night follows day.

This law of death through sin was introduced by God to the first man of His creation. God said to Adam: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Adam sinned in willful disobedience. At the moment of his sin spiritual death entered, and with it exemption from bodily death was forfeited also. Before the fall the human body was capable of immortality, but after Adam sinned it was impossible for him not to die. And since Adam was both the federal and organic representative of the human race, death of necessity fastened itself upon every one of his descendants. The fall had to be universal, extending to all of Adam's posterity (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21). The law cannot be broken; "It is appointed unto men once to die" (Heb. 9:27).

But how does death through sin apply to believers? James addressed himself primarily to Christians. The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, contains a number of illustrations showing to us how sin brings death to the child of God. Now we are certain that there is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1); that is, no person who has been born again can suffer eternal separation from God in hell, which is the second death (Rev. 21:8). However, it is clear from several passages in the Bible that even Christians are punished with physical death because of willful sin. Such deaths are not accidental but divinely intentional. God has struck men dead who persisted in sinning against Him. He killed Nadab and Abihu when they offered strange fire before Him (Lev. 10:1, 2). He killed Ananias and Sapphira when they lied to Him (Acts 5:10). He kills Christians who persist in partaking of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner (1 Cor. 11:30). The Apostle John warns the believer that "There is a sin unto death" (1 John 5:16).

Let not any one of us ever set himself as a judge in these matters by concluding that the early death of a Christian is the judgment of God for sin. God alone is the Judge and He only has full knowledge. But let the law of death through sin serve as a solemn warning to all who claim to be Christian. We ought never to tamper with any of God's laws, certainly not with the law which says that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

Now we all know that sin has its pleasures. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that Moses acknowledged this, but Moses knew also the excitement and gratification which sinful indulgences afford are but "for a season" (Heb. 11:25). To those who live the longest, and enjoy the pleasures of sin to the fullest possible extent, death comes at last and cuts off all the streams of lustful pleasures.

Let a man weigh the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season, with an endless eternity of regret, remorse, and the bitter agonies of divine retribution, and he will make the wise choice to stand with Jesus Christ and the people of God. Before you sin, weigh the recompense of the reward for sin (Heb. 11:26).

Faith can be sure that God will recompense a fair reward commensurate with the reproach that a believer must suffer in this life, for it was by faith that Moses refused the pleasures of Egypt and chose rather to suffer affliction and reproach. Moses renounced those things for which the heart of the natural man craves, those things that are temporal, visible, and satisfying to the lusts of the flesh, and to them he never turned back because he beheld Him who is invisible. Just as sure as we are that sin pays its wages, so sure are we that God will reward those who turn from sin to Jesus Christ.

"Do not err, my beloved brethren." James adds here that we are to make no mistake about these things. There is a question as to whether this verse (16) goes with what precedes it or with the statement which follows. It could well apply to both. We are to make no mistake about the origin of sin (verses 13, 14) or the result of sin (verse 15). Rather we must be exceedingly cautious not to be deceived in these matters.

The sin question, with all of its many implications and ramifications, is perhaps one about which more people are deceived than any other. Many persons have a false idea that they can cast all restraint to the winds and live as they please, expecting God in the end to show mercy. If this book is being read by any person with such ideas, let me pass on to you God's warning: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). "Do not err, my beloved brethren."

Verse 17 mentions another fact about which we are not to err, namely, God is the Author of all that is good. Solicitation to do wrong comes from men and Satan but never from God. He is not the source of our sins and sufferings. Behind every mercy and blessing stands God, the Giver of every good and perfect gift. He is a great Giver.

There is an interesting thought in the use of the word "gift" in this verse. In the Greek these words are not the same. The first word for gift is "*dosis*" and is translated "act of giving." The second usage of the word is "*dorema*," and is translated as the noun "gift." The thought here is rich and beautiful. Both the act of giving and the gift are good. The act of giving would seem to include both the motive and the measure. When God gives, He has no ulterior motive such as giving to receive again. I am not too sure that the motive for our giving gifts at Christmas time is always good. How often have we scurried about at the last minute for a gift for someone only because we received an unexpected gift from that person! How many names have we added to our Christmas card mailing list of those persons who have sent us cards! When God gives, it is "liberally" (1:5), and that with no thought of receiving anything in return. He gave first out of love for man (John 3:16). His daily benefits, like food, clothing, shelter, strength of body, soundness of mind, and mercies too numerous to mention here come from His bountiful heart and hand.

The Apostle Paul wrote: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). Yes, our heavenly Father has given to us all things--His Son, His Spirit, His Word, and His very own life. Every day should be a day of thanksgiving for the child of God.

We have never been charged for one single mercy or blessing, nor have we merited one. James tells us that all blessings come "from above." The expression "from above" is found many times throughout the Scriptures. Our Lord used it when He spoke to Nicodemus about the new birth, He said: "Except a man be born from above" (John 3:3). The word is *anōthen* translated "from above." The new birth is not of this earth, but from another world, from above, even from the heart of God. Our heavenly Father is the source of every good thing.

Here God is called "the Father of lights." I take it that this refers to the great luminaries, the sun, the moon, and the stars. Some of these magnificent heavenly bodies are essential to man's existence, while others may only add to the beauty of God's universe. He has created them all for our blessing, and they are among His "perfect" gifts. With Him there is no "variableness," that is, no changeableness. God is not capricious and changeable like man. We are vacillating,--but God is not. For God's unchangeableness we should be thankful every day of our lives. Praise the Lord for His consistency and constancy. With the Father of Lights there is no variableness.

James adds, ". . . neither shadow of turning." The American Standard Version, and other versions, translate this expression "neither shadow that is cast by turning." We have observed an eclipse of the sun as it has been obscured by the moon. This is a shadow caused by turning.

God is the Author of light, and with Him is no darkness at all, not so much as a shadow. The dark shadows that bring their gloom and sadness to the human heart come from an earthly source. When we allow anything to come between God and us, we must walk in the shadows without the light of His countenance. But He has not changed. He does not cast the shadows. If there are shadows without the Light, it is because we have turned our faces from Him, thereby causing them ourselves. Let us behold Him daily in the beauty of holiness that we may experience the light of His presence and reflect that Light to others.

Life Through the Word

James 1:18-20 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. 19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. 20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

The subject before us is one of the most blessed in Chapter One. This truth, namely, Regeneration, the imparting of divine life through the Word, is one of unspeakable importance. Actually this is the Bible's major message. The salvation of man is that purpose for which Christ came. He said as much in Luke 19:10. This is a vast subject and understandable only through its several aspects: Regeneration, Redemption, Justification, Sanctification, Repentance, Faith.

In verse 18 James takes up the subject of Regeneration. The word regeneration appears but two times in the Bible (Matt. 19:28; Titus 3:5, 6). In the passage in Matthew it means "a new order," referring to the millennium, Christ's kingdom on earth. In Titus Paul uses the word in reference to the spiritual aspect of the kingdom. It is the "new order," the "new creation," into which God places the believing sinner the moment he believes.

Regeneration may be defined as an act of God whereby He bestows upon the believing sinner new life. This life is God's own life. God Himself is the Bestower, the believer is but the recipient. Our Lord said it is impossible for a man to enter into the kingdom of God (the new order) except he be born again. Being "born again" (John 3:3), "born . . . of God" (John 1:13), "Born . . . of the Spirit" (John 3:5) are expressions synonymous with being regenerated.

In speaking of the believer's new life in Christ, James writes: "Of His own will begat He us." This new life has its origin with God. He begat us. It is one of the perfect gifts from above of verse 17. If God did not will to save us, we could not possibly be saved. "Salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah 2:9). He "is . . . not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

God wants all men everywhere to be saved. He always has said to man, "I will"; but the sinner does not receive God's life until he too replies, "I will." God is saying, "I will if you will." This is the essential factor in the marriage ceremony. The marriage is not recognized until both the man and the woman say "I will." When Christ gave Himself for the Church (Eph. 5:25), He manifested the love of God, and that was the "I will" of God, without which man's "I will" would be useless. But oh, blessed truth that God said "I will" in the long ago!

James reminds us that it was first of "His [God's] own will" that a man is born from above. That God, of His own free will, should choose us to be heirs of eternal salvation through faith in His Son is the greatest marvel of all times. Eternal salvation is the apex of giving. God fashioned and finished redemption by His own will. We are born again, begotten, brought forth from the dead, not "of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13).

The Revised Version translates the words "begat He us" to read "brought us forth." The construction of the Greek is participial, and reads "Willing He brought us forth." Induced by no other reason, God willingly brought us forth out of death into life (John 5:24). In verse 15 James uses the term "bringeth forth." The lust and sin are seen bringing "forth death"; here God, through His Work, begets life.

The Apostle is careful to mention next the instrument of Regeneration: "the Word of truth." The "Word of truth" is the whole system of Christian truth found within the confines of the Bible. It is the Word of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Plumptre writes: "It is something more than the written Word of the Old Testament Scriptures, or even the spoken word of preachers. It is the whole message from God to man, of which the written or spoken word is but one of the channels, and which to those who receive it rightly is the beginning of a higher life."

We cannot say too much about the necessity of the preeminence of God's Word in the Christian ministry. The use of "Christian films" and "gospel magic" may have a place in some phase of Christian activity, but they are a poor substitute for the teaching and preaching of God's Word. "For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb.4:12).

The Word of God includes the whole of God's verbal communications to man, and I believe this to be the idea that James attaches to the phrase. God's Word is "quick": that is, living, active, not a dead letter but a living and life-giving spirit. Proclaim it with accuracy and clarity and in the power of the Holy Spirit, and it is certain to work in all who believe (1 Thess. 2:13).

There is a principle, or call it law, which says that all good seed brought in contact with moist earth will produce and develop life. So with the good seed of the Word of God. In it there is a potency resident that, when received into the good ground of a believing heart, will produce and develop life (Mark 4:3, 14, 20). The Apostle Peter wrote: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Peter 1:23). The Bible is doubtless the one instrument used to bring to pass the greatest revival and revolutionary movements for good in world history. James is but repeating the words of the Lord Jesus when he writes that we are brought forth (begotten) with the word of truth (John 5:24). Paul does

likewise when he adds: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Only living things can produce life.

Since the Bible is a living Book, it is likewise a life-giving Book. This is a mystery not easy to explain, just as there is mystery attached to life in general that the most clever biologist cannot explain; but we are certain that the Bible works. The writer, at the time of this writing, is in his sixteenth year as pastor in the same church. He has sought to preach and teach the Word of God faithfully and has seen it work miracles in the transformation of hundreds of lives. "So shall My Word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa. 55:11).

The Apostle includes God's purpose in regeneration: "that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures." To understand the meaning of this term, I suggest we look together at an Old Testament ceremony practiced by Israel. In connection with the Passover celebration, the Israelite presented to the Lord the firstfruits of the harvest. It was an act of consecration in which the offering of the part was a pledge of the whole. The worshiper was acknowledging that it all came from the Lord, hence all belonged to Him (Lev. 23:9-14). Just as soon as Israel arrived in the land flowing with milk and honey and gathered the first harvest, God was to have His portion first (Lev. 23:14; Deut. 26:1, 2). The land did not belong to them. It was God's possession and they were holding it in trust for Him. The believer is to recognize the principle of divine ownership in everything he possesses.

Now when a believing sinner is regenerated he is not his own. Having been bought with a price he becomes the purchased possession of the One Who redeemed him (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). When God saves a man, giving him a new life, that life is God's possession, and the Christian is merely holding it in trust for its Owner.

We must recognize the principle of divine ownership in all that we possess. All that we are and have are God's. When I consecrate my first waking moments to God in the morning, it is but a symbol and earnest all of my time is at His disposal. When I commence my day by giving to my Lord the first expressions of adoration and affection, it is but a symbol and pledge that He has first claim upon my heart at all times. When I bring to God the firstfruits of all money He entrusts to my care, it is a symbol and promise that all which remains is at His disposal. This is a true recognition of the fundamental principle: namely, "All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee" (1 Chron. 29:14). After all, He regenerated us and we are a kind of firstfruits.

It is written of the redeemed: "These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb" (Rev. 14:4). Of Old Testament saints we read: "Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the firstfruits of His increase" (Jer. 2:3). May it ever be so of us!

"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James 1:19). At first glance it might seem that this verse introduces a sharp change of thought, yet it is not so sharp a change when examined more closely. It begins with the word "wherefore." The use of "wherefore" usually refers to something that has gone before. James has just stated the power of the Word in regeneration. God brings us forth out of spiritual death into life by His Word. Now because of this, let the "beloved brethren . . . be swift to hear." The exhortation is to alertness and alacrity to receive the truth of the Word of God. Our Lord said: "The sower soweth the Word . . . He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Mark 4:14, 9). (See also Revelation 2:7, 11, 29; 3:6, 13, 22.)

If the sinner wishes to have life, and the brethren wish to attain to the maturity of Christian manhood, "let every man be swift to hear." I fear that our times have produced a pace so fast and a multiplicity of attractions so appealing that men are not ready and eager to avail themselves of the many opportunities of increasing their acquaintance with the "Word of truth." The spoken and the written Word of God is available to every one of us. There are many cheap and trifling things in current conversation, newspapers, magazines, on television and radio in which we act wisely when we are slow to hear, but we need to be eager listeners and readers of those things that God would say to us.

Could it be that we are not more "swift to hear" because we are not "slow to speak"? God gave us two ears and only one mouth. Should we not be twice as swift to listen and learn? A wise man will listen to others and answer only if he is certain he has something worthwhile to say.

Some of us are blighted with the craving to be incessantly chattering. A proverb says "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise" (Prov. 10:19). To refrain the lips is not always easy, but it is the better part of true wisdom. A tongue that is not still lacks the control of the discerning. A wise man is of a quiet spirit. "He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding" (Prov. 17:27, 28). The Christian who is well taught in the "Word of truth" is slow to speak, for he knows 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 foregoing reference does not suggest that a man is justified on the ground of a good confession of words. Salvation is by grace through faith, and not through works or words of any description. But let all believers bear in mind at all times that we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ to give an account of deeds done in the body (2 Cor. 5:10). The Christian, living according to the Word of God, will not utter useless, barren words.

“Wherefore . . . let every man be . . . slow to wrath.” From both personal experience and observation I think I know why James might have linked the two expressions “slow to speak, slow to wrath.” We all are acquainted with the fact that words unfitly spoken often cause an outburst of temper. What starts out as a sincere and friendly discussion sometimes leads to an argument, with its resulting flare of anger. Among those things for which the Christian should seek wisdom (1:5), there is the ever-present need for a controlled tongue and a controlled temper. When we are “swift to hear” the Word of truth, we will be slow to become angry. The same Word which is able to save the sinner is likewise able to sanctify the saint (John 17:17). The hearer and doer of God's Word will practice self-control at all times.

The Scriptures never speak against a child of God's becoming righteously angry at sin. Contrariwise, the Bible says: “Ye that love the Lord, hate evil” (Psalm 97:10). One of the deficiencies among believers is the lack of concern and the loss of capacity to be aroused over evil. There is an anger which is not sin. It is stated by Paul where he writes: “Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil” (Eph. 4:26, 27). The indication here is that a believer can be angry apart from sinning. If I am angry at nothing but sin, I can be angry so as not to sin.

Now we must beware lest we excuse sheer temper by calling it righteous indignation. If a violent passion is aroused in my mind, accompanied by the desire to take vengeance or to obtain satisfaction from one who has offended me, and that passion is accompanied by a hidden malice or smouldering resentment in my heart, I have sinned. But there is that unhappy aftermath which always comes to those who are guilty of this sin: “A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment” (Prov. 19:19). One of the firstfruits of every newborn child of God is the subduing of every evil passion. Yet we have met not a few Christians who seem to be weak at this point. Anger and a bad temper cling to them.

Lest any reader treat lightly of this matter, let me illustrate further. As I write these lines there comes to mind an incident which occurred only recently. A young married man came to the study requesting membership in our assembly, but he felt that in all honesty I should know that he had been released recently from prison, having served two years for the crime of involuntary manslaughter. One day while at his work the foreman of his department issued an order of which my friend disapproved. An argument followed, words became heated, tempers flared, and fists flew. In the fracas the foreman was knocked to the floor, his head striking a sharp object causing his death. The Christian man was tried in a court of law, found guilty, and sentenced to from two to twelve years in prison. After serving two years he was released for good behavior, but must remain on parole for ten years. He now has gotten victory over the sin of wrath, but at what a price! God had to put him in a prison cell for two years to teach him a lesson he might have learned more easily. Many murders proceed from wrath.

The Bible condemns sinful anger. Our Lord said: “Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment” (Matt. 5:22). The application of this verse for us is a warning against unwarranted anger with a fellow Christian which issues from pride and which desires the injury of the one against whom the anger is aimed. When Jesus went into the temple and beheld the money changers, He was angry with an anger that scorched and blistered; but His was not a selfish and vindictive anger expressed with contempt. The true children of God's kingdom are partakers of the divine nature, having been made righteous. They therefore love the brethren.

The Apostle Paul includes wrath as one of the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:20) and therefore must be “put away” (Eph. 4:31). There ought never to be any passionate outburst of anger or hostile feeling coming from a child of God. We must pray daily that God might set a guard at the door of our lips so that we might be slow to speak and slow to wrath. Remember, “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (Prov. 15:1).

The Apostle now gives a reason why the believer must be slow to wrath. “For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God” (James 1:20). The righteousness which God requires, that is, the righteous character of God that every man must behold in the children of God, is obscured when we become angry. Anger does not help the cause of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Lord once said to His disciples: “They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service” (John 16:2). Here Christ is predicting that religious Jews will angrily persecute His followers, going as far as to murder them, feeling they were doing God service by their deeds of violence. Saul of Tarsus so persecuted Christians because he believed them heretical (Acts 8:1). These things he regretfully testified to later (Acts 26:9, 10). After Paul's conversion a fanatical and bloodthirsty band of more than forty conspired to kill him (Acts 23:12, 13). But such a display of man's wrath never shows forth the righteousness of God. When a man is unrighteously angry, it is not possible for him to speak and act righteously. An angry person is not fully rational says and does things he would never do in a quiet and thoughtful moment.

The anger of those Jews of whom our Lord spoke in John 16:2 prevails in those who hear God's Word but refuse to surrender to it. Their wrath was kindled because the disciples of Christ preached His Deity and Messiahship, which they rejected. How like some who attend our churches today and get angry when the plain truth of the Scriptures is taught! Cain rejected God's demand for a blood sacrifice; and when God rejected his offering, Cain in anger killed his brother (Gen. 4:1-8). Men get angry today when they hear the minister of God's Word say that there cannot possibly be salvation apart from the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Actually all such do not get angry with man but with God Himself. Such anger does no one good. It does only eternal hurt.

Even Christians become angry when the preaching of God's Truth convicts them of some wrongdoing. I recall such anger early in my own Christian experience. I had joined a lodge where its members were made to swear to a secret oath. At that time I knew nothing of what the Bible taught about a child of God's becoming a member of a secret society. Then one day Evangelist Anthony Zeoli came to our community to conduct a series of preaching services. In a part of one message on the separation of Christians, he quoted more than a score of Bible references condemning such practices among believers. That night I became so angry I thought to myself I would never attend church again. But that message was just what I needed, and sometime during the ensuing year the Spirit of God convicted me greatly, and I then and there decided that I must withdraw from that secret society inasmuch as the Word of God condemned such affiliations for Christians.

It is God's design to produce practical righteousness in each of His children, but this can never be accomplished where anger is permitted to lay smoldering in the heart. The true Christian will be swift to listen to and learn the Word of Truth, and this in turn will crowd out the sin of anger. Does God see in each of us that holy character for which He longs? Let us remember at all times that wrath in a servant of Jesus Christ is a misrepresentation of His saving Gospel and is therefore out of place.

This study is a portion of the book entitled, *James Your Brother: Studies in the Epistle of James*, by Lehman Strauss. We've been unable to obtain the entire book.

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