

JAMES

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These studies in James form part of the Preachers' Study Papers series that Grace Baptist Mission is publishing. The primary aim of these studies is to help those whom the Head of the Church has called to be ministers of God's Word. These will be pastors, preachers, evangelists and teachers. However, it is not just for men. Women have a vital role to fulfil in the work of the kingdom of God. They too must be equipped for the task and we trust that the studies will be used by women as well.

The study papers are intended to help those whose task is to preach and teach the Word of God, whether it be to a congregation or in a mentoring one-to-one role. The Holy Spirit has inspired and given us God's Word in the format that he considers most suitable for the needs of making known the gospel of Jesus Christ to this fallen world. The studies systematically work through a Bible book, following the purpose and theme of the book. We endeavour to help the student to grasp the overall meaning of the passage as well as studying the text in detail. One preacher has said that his wife should be able to wake him up in the middle of the night and ask him what his sermon the next day will be. He should be able to reply in one sentence the purpose and theme of the sermon, roll back over and go to sleep. Such ability shows that the passage has been studied, understood, prepared for the congregation in question and is ready for delivery.

We are grateful to Clifford Pond who prepared the original material for these studies. He writes from a background of being a pastor for many years. He has brought this wealth of experience to the very practical letter of James. The studies are only an aid and cannot replace the Word of God. The study of the Bible is essential and necessary for anyone preparing to preach or teach its contents. These studies are written as tools to help in fulfilling that task. We trust you will find these studies helpful and edifying and that God's Spirit will enable you to have wonderful insights into his truth.

Grace Baptist Mission
April 2006

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations in this publication are from the New International Version
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Abbreviations for Bible Books

Old Testament

Genesis	Gen.	Ecclesiastes	Eccl.
Exodus	Ex.	The Song of Solomon	Song
Leviticus	Lev.	Isaiah	Is.
Numbers	Num.	Jeremiah	Jer.
Deuteronomy	Deut.	Lamentations	Lam.
Joshua	Josh.	Ezekiel	Ezek.
Judges	Judg.	Daniel	Dan.
Ruth	Ruth	Hosea	Hos.
1 Samuel	1 Sam.	Joel	Joel
2 Samuel	2 Sam.	Amos	Amos
1 Kings	1 Kings	Obadiah	Obad.
2 Kings	2 Kings	Jonah	Jonah
1 Chronicles	1 Chr.	Micah	Mic.
2 Chronicles	2 Chr.	Nahum	Nah.
Ezra	Ezra	Habakkuk	Hab.
Nehemiah	Neh.	Zephaniah	Zeph.
Esther	Esth.	Haggai	Hag.
Job	Job	Zechariah	Zech.
Psalms	Ps.	Malachi	Mal.
Proverbs	Prov.		

New Testament

Matthew	Matt.	1 Timothy	1 Tim.
Mark	Mark	2 Timothy	2 Tim.
Luke	Luke	Titus	Titus
John	John	Philemon	Philm.
The Acts	Acts	Hebrews	Heb.
Romans	Rom.	James	James
1 Corinthians	1 Co.	1 Peter	1 Pet.
2 Corinthians	2 Co.	2 Peter	2 Pet.
Galatians	Gal.	1 John	1 John
Ephesians	Eph.	2 John	2 John
Philippians	Phil.	3 John	3 John
Colossians	Col.	Jude	Jude
1 Thessalonians	1 Thess.	Revelation	Rev.
2 Thessalonians	2 Thess.		

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James follows the teaching of Jesus

James reflects the teaching of Jesus to his disciples as the following list shows:-

<u>James</u>	<u>Teaching</u>	<u>Jesus</u>
1:5-6	Faith in prayer	Matt. 21:21
1:27	Caring	Matt. 25:34-40
2:8	Loving neighbours	Luke 10:25-37
2:10	Law-keeping	Matt. 5:18-19
2:13	Showing mercy	Matt. 5:7
2:15-16	Compassion	Matt. 15:32
3:2-12	Speech and tongue	Matt. 12:37
3:17	Purity	Matt. 5:8
3:18	Peaceableness	Matt. 5:9
4:6	Humility	Matt. 23:12
4:13-16	Submission to God	Luke 12:18-20
4:17	Obedience	Luke 12:47
5:1-2	Danger of riches	Luke 6:24
5:10-11	Response to persecution	Matt. 5:10-12
5:12	Honesty	Matt. 5:34-37
5:16	Prayer	Matt. 7:7-8
5:20	Winning others	Matt. 18:15

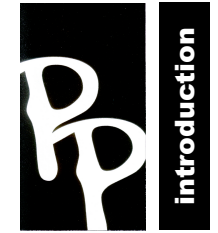
We see then that there is no conflict between James and any other part of the Bible; his letter is part of “all Scripture” that is “God-breathed” (2 Tim.3:16) and is totally trustworthy.

Outline of the letter

It is not easy to outline this letter because it is not a logical argument that can be followed from one point to the next one. James' letter is more like a collection of notes on different matters that he feels are important. After a fairly long passage about testings and temptations (1:2-18), he covers a whole range of Christian conduct, interrupted by an argument about faith and works (2:14-26) and a warning against ungodliness (4:13-5:6).

- I Greeting 1:1
- II Testings and temptations 1:1-18

WHO, WHY AND WHAT?



The letter by James

Authorship

In introducing ourselves to this Bible book, we need to consider which James is the author. There are a number of men mentioned in the Scriptures by that name. We can eliminate the following men as not being the writer of this letter.

It is **not**

- ✗ the son of Zebedee (Matt.4:21) who was killed by Herod (Acts 12:2)
- ✗ the son of Alphaeus (Matt.10:3)
- ✗ the son of Mary (Mk.15:40) who was called “the younger”.
- ✗ the father of Judas (Thaddeus) (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13).

Who then is the author?

The author of the letter is most likely a brother of Jesus who before the resurrection of Jesus was an unbeliever (John 7:5), but became a disciple (Acts 1:14) and to whom Jesus made himself known after he rose from death (1 Cor.15:7). He became a leader in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13; Gal.1:19).



Note: 1

We do not know for certain that the letter by James was written by our Lord's brother of that name. Other authors have been suggested, but evangelical scholars are generally agreed that there is good reason to accept that the writer of this letter is indeed a brother of Jesus, and this is in harmony with a very ancient tradition.



Note 2

Assuming this to be true, we would expect James' letter to throw some light on what Jesus was like to live with at home, before his public ministry. The following may be examples:-

Perseverance (1:3-4)
Self-control (1:19)
Impartiality (2:1)
Humility (3:13)
Purity and peace (3:17-18).

The message of this letter

The simple message of this letter is that “professed faith that is not accompanied by a life of faith is not true faith”. This message is important because:-

- ✓ there has always been the temptation to think that so long as we observe the right rituals God will be satisfied with us. Old Testament prophets constantly protested against this. As Samuel said to king Saul, “To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam. 15:22-23). See also Isaiah 1:11-17 and Amos 5:21-27. James would have been well aware of this teaching in Jewish history as he wrote this letter primarily to Jewish Christians (the twelve tribes scattered among the nations 1:1).
- ✓ Jesus insisted that a claim to be a Christian had to be confirmed by a life of obedience (Matt. 7:15-23; John 14:15).
- ✓ Some people argue that if we are saved for ever by faith alone (Eph.2:8) we are then at liberty to live sinfully. Paul dealt with this argument (Rom. 6:1-7; Gal. 5:13) by insisting that faith unites us to Jesus Christ enabling us to “live a new life”.
- ✓ If our attempts to persuade people to come to faith in Jesus Christ for salvation are not accompanied by the evidence of our own changed lives, we will fail.
- ✓ In some kinds of evangelism people are exhorted to come to faith in Jesus Christ for deliverance from “the wrath to come”, and this is separated from a call to godliness. Jesus Christ as Saviour is separated from Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives. In theological terms this is separating justification and sanctification. We must always remember that the Holy Spirit who leads us to faith in

Christ for justification at the same time gives us new birth beginning a life of obedience and submission to Christ as our Lord.

This letter by James is a powerful reminder of these things.

A problem that is not a problem

James' letter is full of teaching about Christian conduct and he says little or nothing about the fact that we need salvation before ever we can either want to live as he says we should, or be able to do so. The question is, does this mean that James is saying that we can be saved by “works”, by living according to his teaching? The problem tends to be focused on chapter 2 verses 14-26, but when we come to those verses, we will see that James' great burden is that his readers make quite sure that their faith proves to be genuine because it tends to godly living. We can confirm this in at least two ways:-

1. James assumes his readers are professing Christians because he calls them “brothers” (15 times), which means that they are in the family of believers through faith in Jesus Christ. They already have “faith” which is being tested.

This is confirmed by the fact that they:

- love God (1:12)
- are believers in Jesus Christ (2:1)
- are waiting for the Lord's return (5:7)
- believe “the truth” (5:19)

All these signs, taken together, mean that James' teaching assumes that his readers are professing Christians already; he is not giving them guidance as to how to become Christians. Also, James knows that salvation begins with God's choice (2:5) and is not on the basis of anything believers themselves can do.

2. James agrees with Paul. It is agreed that Paul's great emphasis is on salvation through faith and not by “works” (Rom. 4:4-5; Eph.2:8). But Paul is equally clear that when we are Christians our faith shows itself in godliness (Rom. 6:12-13; 8:4; Gal.5:6). It is quite wrong to think of Paul and James in conflict with each other. As we go through this letter we will see good reasons for the stress that James puts on the need to be practical Christians.

a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Assuming the writer was Jesus' brother, these words are remarkable in their humility and in the complete absence of any special claim. James gives our Lord's full title, reflecting his uniqueness. "Lord" identifies him as God. "Jesus" reflects his humanness, the one who trod the roads of Palestine. "Christ" (the Greek word of the Hebrew "Messiah") means the one who was promised and appointed to carry out God's saving work.

To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations:

This does not mean that the 12 tribes of Israel still existed as such in New Testament days, or that they can now be identified. James wrote as a Jewish Christian and his letter is addressed mainly to Jewish believers scattered widely from Jerusalem because of persecution (Acts 8:1). The inclusion of this letter in the Bible, however, means that it is for Gentile Christians also, since every part of the Bible is God's Word for all people (2 Tim. 3:16).

Greetings.

It is a fair assumption that the "letter" mentioned in Acts 15:23 was composed by James who had led the meeting (Acts 15:13), and that it is the same James who began in the same way here.

Verse 2

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

James is addressing his "brothers" which means that they are born again believers belonging to the spiritual family of God, with God as their Father and all other believers as their brothers and sisters. No doubt James had news of trials faced by the scattered believers. The trials were in the form of persecution from Gentiles because they were Jews. Opposition would also have come from non-believing Jews because they were Christians. But all Christians are warned in Scripture that they will suffer because of their faith (Matt.5:11-12; 2 Tim.3:12). Normally trials make us miserable rather than joyful. This joy is possible for Christians who consider their situation to be under God's control, and who remember their present blessings in Christ and their glorious future (Rom. 8:18).

Verse 3

because you know

Christian joy does not arise from physical or material pleasures and benefits, but from what we know about ourselves and what God is doing with us in every situation.

III Christian conduct 1:19 – 5:20

- 1) Slow to be angry 1:19-20
- 2) Obedient to the Word 1:21-25
- 3) Pure in speech 1:26
- 4) Caring 1:27
- 5) Being the same to all 2:1-7
- 6) Obedient to God's law 2:8-13

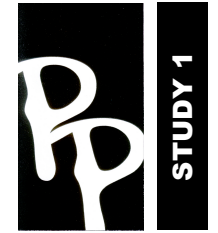
(Interruption about faith and works – 2:14-26)

- 7) Reluctant to teach 3:1-2
- 8) Controlling the tongue 3:3-12
- 9) Wise 3:13-16
- 10) Right in motives 4:1-3
- 11) Separated 4:4-5
- 12) Humble 4:6-12

(Interruption with warnings against ungodliness 4:13-5:6)

- 13) Patient 5:7-11
- 14) Honest 5:12
- 15) Prayerful 5:13-18
- 16) Concerned for a saving ministry 5:19-20

THE TESTING OF YOUR FAITH



James 1:1-8

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: Prayer
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

After a believer named Stephen was stoned to death in Jerusalem, in the early days of the church, there was a great persecution against the believers and large numbers of them were scattered far and wide (Acts 7:59-8:4). Wherever they went they spoke about Jesus Christ and salvation through him, and undoubtedly many of them suffered severely for their faith. James stayed in Jerusalem, but out of concern for these people he began his letter with the words of encouragement and instruction in these verses.

What these verses mean

Verse 1

James,

This is almost certainly a brother of Jesus Christ (see the Introduction, page 1). The idea that Mary was never other than a virgin and that the “brothers” of Jesus (Matt.13:55) must have been children of Joseph and not Mary has no support in Scripture or anywhere else.

- b. Natural joy depends on pleasing circumstances and prospects – these are absent from the examples.
 - c. Natural joy is often achieved by such things as drink, drugs, sex, entertainment. Christian joy has no need of such stimulation - it comes from within ourselves.
3. It is the inward work of the Spirit. (See Galatians 5:22.)

II Christian joy arises from what we know

- 1. We do not have to wait for a special ecstatic experience or work up joy by attending lively meetings.
- 2. Our joy arises from the application of what we know:
 - a. that nothing can separate us from God's love (Rom. 8: 38-39).
 - b. that we are destined for glory (Luke 10:20).
 - c. that God has a wise and loving purpose in every situation (Rom.5:3-4).
 - d. that we are in good company (Matt. 5:11-12).



Focus Point:

Prayer ¹

James in opening his letter touches upon the subject of prayer. He does this when considering wisdom. We are to ask God for it. James talks about prayer later on in the letter (5:13). What is prayer? How do we pray? These are questions that many ask about. The disciples themselves asked Jesus to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1). Prayer is a vital part of the Christian believer's life.

Whereas the Bible is the Word of God to man, prayer is the word of man to God. Prayer simply means talking with God and expressing our fellowship with him. It is the provision of the Lord whereby we may develop and deepen our relationship with him. This means prayer is much more than coming to God with a list of needs and no more.

When the Lord Jesus Christ was on earth he taught his disciples how to pray. And he taught them what is often called "The Lord's Prayer".

¹. The following notes have been taken from "Bible Study and Prayer", a booklet published in association with a radio programme series called *Sound Words*. This booklet together with another one in the series called "Help with Prayer" can be obtained by writing to Grace Baptist Mission at the address given at the front of this book.

that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

Faith is like the muscles in our body. If they are not used they become useless, but if they are made to work hard, they become stronger and benefit the rest of the body. Trials make our faith work hard because they drive us to the Lord in prayer. Trials also make us think deeply about what we believe so that we see the Lord and all the blessings he gives as more important than passing problems. By these means we are strengthened and enabled to persevere in the Christian life. This assumes that someone is doing the testing! This then is another reason for joy in suffering because we know that our heavenly Father is working out his loving and wise purpose in us.

Verse 4

Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

A large part of God's purpose in our trials is to bring us to the best possible usefulness in our Christian life, witness and service. We can liken this to the full development of our bodies, so that we are full of strength, life and vitality and reach our full physical potential (see also Rom. 5:3-4). In and through all this, the Lord is preparing us for everlasting glory when we will indeed be "complete, not lacking anything".

Verse 5

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God,

One thing that we may lack is wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to apply what we know to ourselves and our situation so that we can be joyful and grow into spiritual maturity. This is not a natural talent or intellectual knowledge we learn. Wisdom is a spiritual gift from God and in this context the wisdom referred to is particularly how we are to understand and behave when facing trials. We therefore have to ask for it.

who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

James puts in these two general comments about God's response to our prayers for wisdom. God is generous and responds to our prayers for wisdom. This also applies too for any other request we might make of God (Matt. 7:7-8) when asked in the proper manner (see next verse). James encourages us by assuring us that God is not reluctant to meet our needs, nor is he impatient with our constant coming to him.

Verse 6

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.

James now balances his encouraging comments about prayer with some heart-searching about our attitude in prayer. There has to be prayer. Without our asking God will not give. The prayer has to be a believing prayer. This means that the person praying is totally convinced of the power, love, mercy, grace and faithfulness of the one he is praying to. The greater the knowledge and understanding a person has of God from the Bible, the more certain will the person be of their request. The prayer must be firm and not a mixture of boldness and unbelief. James uses the picture of a very strong wind blowing over the sea. The waves are blown about. If a boat were to be on the sea it could be blown anywhere by the wind with no ability to control where it was going. This is a description of someone who prays without real faith and conviction. See Ephesians 4:14 for a similar picture Paul uses to describe false teaching and teachers. We can say that firm prayer comes from a sound understanding of God's truth and a close relationship with God.

verse 7

That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord;

We must be serious, determined to hear what God says to us and to act upon it. God does not treat seriously the prayers of those who are not serious in their requests.

Verse 8

he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

It is possible for us to be guilty of looking in opposite directions at the same time. We may be trying to see both man's wisdom and God's wisdom. We may want to retain our own ideas while asking God for his help. The man with a divided heart is not steady. He is unstable in all that he does. He will end up being a sad and miserable person. This is not the way to progress in the spiritual life. What we are in prayer is the real truth about us!



Summary

The Christian is to expect trials and difficulties because of being a follower of Jesus Christ. These things do not happen by accident, but are used by God to test the faith of his children. Through such experiences the person of faith is strengthened and enabled to persevere and to be useful in the Christian life. This Christian life is supernatural and can only be lived out by born again people who constantly look to the Lord for his wisdom and help. It is wisdom that enables a person to apply to their life the circumstances going on around them. This gives them joy and they are able to grow in spiritual maturity. This wisdom is to be requested with a belief that God will give it. He will give wisdom to those who ask because he is generous. Those who hesitate and doubt will not receive wisdom and their lives will be sad and unsteady, blown around like waves on a wind-swept sea.



A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses

Theme: The true nature of Christian joy

Introduction

The subject is important because

- (a) many Christians are not as joyful as they should be.
- (b) a joyless Christian is a bad advertisement for Christianity.
- (c) a joyful Christian is a good witness in a society full of tragedy and distress.

I True joy is only possible to true believers

1. Think of some outstanding examples of joy.
 - a. Paul and Silas in prison in Philippi (Acts 16:25).
 - b. Christian martyrs who were prepared to die for their faith.
 - c. Jesus, within hours of the cross, spoke much about his joy (John 15:11; 17:13).
2. This is of a higher quality than natural joy.
 - a. Natural joy depends on physical well-being – Christian joy is independent of it.

Many Christians find that as they read their Bibles each day, they are stimulated in prayer by what God has revealed in the Scriptures. So as we read the Bible we can ask ourselves questions such as, “What is God teaching me to pray about today? In what area of my life do I need help to apply what I have been taught in my reading?”

To pray for God’s will to be done in our own lives is very challenging, yet also encouraging. It is challenging because it means we should be living in a way that is obedient to God. This applies to all that we do and the way we do it. It applies to what we say, and when and how we say it. It even applies to what we think and allow our minds to dwell upon. But alongside this it is also a great encouragement to pray. As we think, for example, what we shall be doing today and those areas of our lives where we want God’s will to be done for us, we can bring these to God in prayer. This really means we can pray about everything we are involved in, and seek the blessing of God’s will being done in our lives, and in the lives of those we love and are concerned about. It really means that we want God at the centre of our lives and desire to serve God and do what he says.

Up to now the Lord’s Prayer has taught us to concentrate our thoughts on God, his honour and his will. What Jesus has done is to teach us to put God first. Serving him is to be the Christian’s great aim. The followers of Jesus are to be God-centred and Christ-centred, not self-centred.

Give us today our daily bread.

While we are to be God-centred, that does not mean we cannot pray about our own needs. Jesus encourages us to do this here. This request really indicates that we are dependent on God for everything. Christian believers are very needy, and this phrase of the Lord’s Prayer teaches us to cry out to God, who we know loves us, to provide for us each day. The fact that we are to pray for today’s need means the followers of Jesus will be praying every day, and will be living every day in conscious dependence on the Lord. This again shows how interested and concerned God is for us, even down to our daily food. Learning to trust God in this way will help us not to be over-anxious, but to have calm and peace because we rest in his care (Matt. 6:25-34).

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

This is a prayer that refers to our relationships with God and with other people. The word “debts” is often translated by the word “trespasses”. Our relationship with God is affected, because it is God that we disobey and sin or trespass against ultimately. Even the

We find this in Matthew 6:9-13. It is a prayer that many followers of Jesus have committed to memory and they find great comfort in thoughtfully and earnestly repeating the actual words of the prayer when they talk to God. It is a wonderful prayer and it really covers every area of need that we shall ever face. But it is more than a prayer to learn and repeat. It is a pattern for our own prayers. It is a model prayer, if you like.

This is important to remember because there is always the danger when we know a prayer off by heart, that we can simply repeat the words without really meaning what we are praying and asking for. Indeed, Jesus warned his disciples not to be like the hypocrites who prayed just like that (Matt. 6:7): “*And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*” A very good example of this is found in 1 Kings 18. Elijah, the prophet of God, gave a challenge to the prophets of the false god, Baal. He told them to pray to their god, Baal, and he would pray to the Lord. They were both to build altars, place sacrifices on them, and pray that fire would fall from heaven to light the sacrifices. The true God, said Elijah, would be the God who sent the fire. The prophets of Baal prayed all day, repeating themselves and saying many words in a frenzy – even cutting themselves to make Baal answer them. But they received no answer. Then Elijah prayed. If you look at his prayer it is obvious that Elijah knew God. In it he desired the will of God and the glory of God. Elijah prayed in true faith and reliance on God, and his prayer was far more effective than all the repetitious cries of the prophets of Baal. His prayer was very short, but came from his heart, and the fire fell from heaven. We should pray as Elijah prayed.

Jesus, having warned his disciples about the wrong kind of praying, then introduced “the Lord’s Prayer” (Matt. 6:9) with these words: “*This, then, is how you should pray.*” In other words, this prayer is to be our guide in all our praying.

Our Father in heaven,

“The Lord’s Prayer” begins with these words, “*Our Father in heaven*”. This is a remarkable statement. It tells us that God, who created the universe, who flung stars into space and made the beautiful flowers, the almighty, sovereign, holy God becomes our Father when we follow Jesus! And that in itself opens up for us the whole area of praise and adoration of God in our prayers. What he has done for us in Jesus is

truly amazing. (See Galatians 4:4-7.) As our Father, God is full of concern for us, his children. He is someone who cares for us. His heart is filled with warmth and tenderness towards us and he wants us to talk to him. The fact that he is “in heaven” is also very instructive. It tells us God is over all. There is no one higher or greater than he. He reigns there as the almighty ruler of the universe. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. (See 1 Timothy 6:15-16.) While again this causes us to praise him, it also gives us great confidence in prayer, because God has the power to help us. How useless it would be to pray to someone who was unable to help us. But we pray to “our Father in heaven” who is able to do more than we can ask or imagine (Eph. 3:20-21).

hallowed be your name,

“Hallowed” is an unusual word that we do not use very often. It really means that we want God to be seen as glorious and holy. It is a prayer that God would be seen by all the world as separate and pure and exalted. It is a prayer that desires God to be glorified. It means that you desire that God should be honoured. It also reminds us that God is wonderful and fearful, and helps us to approach him with reverence and love. These two opening phrases of the Lord’s Prayer help us in several ways in coming to God. They complement each other in this way. That God is our Father teaches us of his closeness to the followers of Jesus, while desiring God to be hallowed teaches us he is great and awesome. Closeness without awe leads to an over-familiarity, and could easily lead us to despise God or take him for granted. On the other hand, awe without closeness leads to terror and anxiety and fear. Then, we would be afraid to approach God at all. But Jesus teaches us that both things are true about God. He is close to Christian believers, while at the same time being awesome. When we follow Jesus’ teaching on prayer this helps us approach God with reverent submission and with confident dependence.

your kingdom come,

The kingdom of God is the place where God’s rule and authority are recognised and seen. Jesus began his ministry preaching about this kingdom (Mark 1:15): “*The time has come,*” he said. “*The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.*” Sometimes this kingdom is called “*the kingdom of God*”, and on other occasions it is called “*the kingdom of heaven*”. They are both referring to the same thing. It is simply that different Gospel writers used either description. When Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when this kingdom

would come, he answered, “*The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.*” (Luke 17:20-21). Jesus then went on to speak about his second coming. So what the Bible is teaching us is that the kingdom started when Jesus came. It began to be displayed as it began to conquer men’s hearts and lives. And it is continuing to do this as the good news about Jesus is shared around the world and people are brought to acknowledge God as their King. This will continue until Jesus comes again, when the kingdom will have reached its fulfilment.

So when we pray, “*Your kingdom come,*” we are praying for three things.

- that we want God’s rule to be established in our own lives. That Jesus would reign as King in our hearts and that our lives will be changed to show this as we submit to his commands.
- that we want his rule to be established and acknowledged worldwide as many men and women and girls and boys are brought to trust in Jesus and are saved. So it is a prayer for evangelism and worldwide mission.
- that we want the Lord’s kingdom to be fully established when he returns.

This, then, directs our minds to the new heavens and new earth (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1). Then we shall be with Jesus, in that place he has gone to prepare for us (John 14:3). Like the previous part of the prayer, this also stimulates our hearts to praise and worship as we think of all that awaits Christian believers.

your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

We have already touched on this previously, but because it is so important we need to consider it again. God’s will is immediately, fully and willingly obeyed in heaven. Christian believers long for this to be the same on earth, including in our own lives. This aspect of prayer is not telling God what to do, but seeking in prayer those things he has promised, so that his will is done. And even in our asking for things, we should only desire God to answer our requests according to his will, not simply ours. Very often the Christian’s will coincides with God’s will, and that is marvellous. But on other occasions Christians can want things that are not God’s will, or that they are not sure are God’s will. So this petition in the Lord’s Prayer means we will only ever want and expect God to answer us in accord with his will.

What these verses mean

Verse 9

The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position.

A Christian who is driven to poverty may well be tempted to despair. This can be resisted by remembering all the spiritual blessings we have in Christ. Realising these blessings we will reckon them to be of greater and more lasting value than any material benefit we may have lost. Our high position is peace with God, membership of the royal family of God and an inheritance of eternal glory. This attitude is only possible to a born again believer, made wise by the Father (1:5).

Verse 10

But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower.

The temptation of the rich is to dote on their riches, to find all their satisfaction in them, and to fear losing them. Such a reliance on worldly possessions can only be short-lived. Like a wild flower they last only a short while and then pass away. This temptation to look to material possessions can be resisted by remembering that in God's sight we are worthless apart from his grace; we are paupers apart from his mercy. This is the condition of true and lasting blessing. This is what we are to seek and to be satisfied with. The world may look upon this as being lowly, but this is the condition in which the person enters the kingdom of God (Matt. 5:3). We should not grieve over material loss because our spiritual riches cannot be taken from us.

Verse 11

For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed.

James continues with the picture of the wild flower and the person who puts their trust in earthly riches. The flower may look beautiful, but only for a short while. When the sun comes up it will wither and be finally destroyed. The sight of its beauty is not everlasting, it passes so quickly.

In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.

Just as the plant withers in the scorching sun so will the rich man as he goes about his business if that is all he is concerned about. The Bible does not condemn being rich, but it does warn of the dangers. Even believers, when they become rich or at least have enough re-

godliest Christian on earth needs to pray this prayer, because we all fall short of the standard God has set for us (see 1 John 1:8-10). Sin still troubles Christians in this life, and sin is a barrier between us and God and needs to be removed (Is. 59:1-2). We are to confess our sins to God, for we need his forgiveness. God has wonderfully provided for this through the Lord Jesus Christ and his death on the cross. Therefore we can seek his mercy in prayer when we have failed him. But as we pray for ourselves, we must also be mindful of those who have sinned against us. And Jesus says that we must be as willing to forgive them, as we want our heavenly Father to forgive us. That really is a challenge. It rebukes any bitterness we may have against someone. It condemns any grudges we might bear or desires for revenge on someone who has hurt us. It exposes any feelings of malice or plans to do evil against others. It teaches us to be loving and forgiving. In short, it teaches us to be like God. He has forgiven us when we did not deserve it. He forgave us even though it cost him the death of his dear Son. He has forgiven us freely. So how unlike God is anyone who fails to forgive others. In Ephesians 4:32 we are taught to "... be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God has forgiven you [us]." This is a very demanding thing for us to do, but proof that God's grace is in our hearts, and that we are forgiven by God, is that we are forgiving people. (See also Matthew 6:14-15.)

Lead us not into temptation.

Every day Christians face many different kinds of temptation. We can be tempted to be greedy, lustful, dishonest, untruthful, unjustly angry, and in many more ways. Now, to overcome temptation requires God's help. Jesus is teaching us here that we cannot do this in our own strength. We need the special help of heaven itself, God's help. We need him to make us strong so that we will not fall into sin. Now this has very practical as well as spiritual implications. If we pray this prayer and then go and read an immoral book, or visit places where we know we shall be tempted, or watch lustful films on television, then really we are being hypocritical. Perhaps this story will help you understand what Jesus is teaching. There was once a rich man who wanted someone to be the driver of his car. A number of men applied for the job. When they were interviewed the rich man asked the first applicant, "How close to the edge of a cliff could you drive my car and keep me safe?" "One metre," he replied. The next was asked the same question and he said, "Half a metre." The final applicant received the same question and he replied, "If you were in the car

while I was driving, then I would keep as far away from the edge of the cliff as I possibly could!” It was the last man who got the job. Now, that is how Christians are to respond to sin and temptation. We are to keep as far away from it as possible, because it is very dangerous.

But even when we have prayed this prayer, and have been careful to avoid temptation, we still have to face it. This is because we live in a sinful world, and we have a spiritual enemy, the devil, who is called the tempter (Matt. 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:5). So when we pray that God will not lead us into temptation, we are also asking that God will help us not to be so burdened by temptation that we give in to it.

But deliver us from evil, or, the evil one.

The difference between a temptation and being delivered from evil, is that the temptation, for example, is tempting to despair, and the evil is falling into the despair. And as these things come from the devil, we need God’s strength and grace to deliver us from the evil one. In 1 John 5:18 we read, “... *the one who is born of God ... the evil one cannot harm him.*” In other words, God has promised to deliver us, so that the evil one will not ultimately harm us.

The Lord’s Prayer covers every area of our lives as Christian believers, and there is no part of our lives that we cannot pray about. We can even tell God about things we would find it difficult to tell anyone else. What a privilege prayer is!

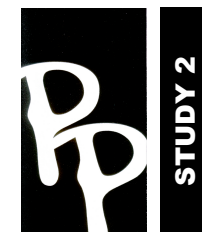


Over to you

When you preach about joy in trials, do your people listen because you are a good example of what you are saying?

Are you sensitive to the trials your people are suffering, so that your ministry does not aggravate but encourage them?

THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TO LIFE AND DEATH



James 1:9-12

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 Two suggestions of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: Suffering as a trial
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

It is not immediately clear how these verses connect with their context, but it seems best to see them as a continuation of the theme of trials that test our faith. James is very practical in his letter to believers. People of all ages, past and present, from all walks of life and from all different cultures are affected and obsessed by riches and poverty. James knows that we need God’s wisdom to have a right attitude to such things. James’ main theme is the testing of faith and he sees that poverty and riches in themselves provide part of the testing of faith. James’ style is not logical argument but a series of comments in verses 1:2-18 helping his readers to develop a Christian attitude to these trials. The result is a number of statements that can stand on their own apart from the context, or be seen in the light of the general theme.

bring, will be worth it. Many of these trials will be through suffering. We therefore in this focus point consider the subject of suffering.

We live in a fallen world

The first question we must examine is, “Why is there suffering in the world at all?” This has often puzzled many because the Bible teaches us that when God created the world, he said that it was very good (Gen. 1:31). So what has gone wrong? The reason is that the world today is quite different from when God created it. And that is because it has become a fallen world. By that we mean it is a world that has fallen into sin. Sin has entered the world. We learn about this in Genesis chapter 3. Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, disobeyed God’s command not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Because they disobeyed him, they sinned, and God has judged mankind, and the whole of creation suffers as a result.

God told Adam and Eve that if they disobeyed him they would die. So death has now come into the world – that is, spiritual death whereby sinners are separated from God, and physical death. Consequently all suffering eventually leads to physical death. God cursed even the ground as punishment for man’s disobedience (Gen. 3:17-19). So we see that the whole of creation was thrown into turmoil because of man’s sin. Suffering is a part of the consequences of man’s disobedience. We live in a sinful, a fallen world and, therefore, part of our lot is that we shall suffer, whether we are Christian believers or not. Thankfully, when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth again, the world will be changed. There will be a new heaven and a new earth when all these things will be done away with. There will be no more suffering for the people of God (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1-4). But that is in the future, and until then, we have to share in the common lot of all mankind, because we live in a world affected by man’s sinfulness.

Is suffering a punishment from God?

Now it is at this point that we need to be very careful. Some people have concluded from what we have just said that when anyone suffers it is as a direct result of some wickedness in their own lives. They say that those who suffer must have committed some great sin, or else they would not be suffering. Is this correct? This is an important question and the Bible answers it in two ways.

- i. We must say that not all suffering we endure is necessarily as a direct result of something which we ourselves have done wrong. We have examples in the Bible. In the Old Testament we read of the sufferings of Job. In John’s Gospel chapter 9 Jesus met a man

sources to save them from worries, can forget the need to care for their spiritual state. A rich convert must quickly realise what are the important things of life. Before conversion his possessions were his obsession. After conversion they are treated as being temporary and unreliable. His trust is now in the lowly things. The wisdom he receives from on high enables him to avoid the dangers and enticements of his riches, which he now recognises as being perishable. All this is heavenly wisdom (1:5) which opens eyes to see the glories of heaven and the emptiness of the earth. (See also the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 6:19-21.)

Verse 12

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial,

James links back to what he has said in 1:2-4. Trials test faith, which in turn develops perseverance. Godly wisdom guides the believer through the trials, by helping him to understand his situation and how he should live his life accordingly. Now James gives us the reason why we are not to give up, but to keep on going. Believers have been given the means (faith and wisdom) to endure the trials. At times the believer might feel overwhelmed by the trials he is going through and it may seem that they will never end. They will end and when they finally do the believer will be blessed. Why?

because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

The believer will be blessed because at the end of his trials there is something wonderful waiting for him, the “crown of life”. This is picture language for a triumphant reception, with the Master’s welcome “Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matt.25:23). This will be the experience of all believers (“those who love him”) who are enabled to persevere through every experience of life. This may be called a reward, so long as we remember that it is only possible by the wisdom, power and mercy of God, and that all the glory is his, while the blessing is ours. People who are suffering severe testing may be the objects of pity in the eyes of people who are not Christians, but in reality, even in the midst of their agonies, such people are to be envied (“blessed”) because of their certain destiny.



Summary

The Christian believer is under pressure because of the world we live in. The Christian may be poor in material things or rich in many possessions. Both are under trial. One may be tempted to doubt God because he has so little and the other to desert God because he has so much.¹

(See also the prayer of Proverbs 30:7-9.) We are not to give in to the things of this world. They will pass away very quickly. Instead we are to put our trust in the things that will last. In the world's eyes these people will be of little value, of lowly position. God does not look upon such people in a lowly way, but rewards them at the end of their earthly trials with a crown of glory. We learn from these verses that our spiritual state is very much more important than our material possessions or our physical well-being, because it is vital, not only for this life, but also for the life to come.



Two suggestions of what to preach about from these verses

Theme I: The Christian attitude to material possessions

1. It is not wrong for Christians to be wealthy

Jesus himself used wealthy people (Luke 7:3). The issue is not how much we possess, but our attitude to what we have no matter how much, and how we use it.

2. Consider wrong attitudes to possessions

We are wrong if

- we are proud of what we have (1 Chron.29:14-16; James 1:10-12)
- we envy those who have more than we do (James 3:16).
- our possessions mean more to us than our spiritual blessings (Matt.6:20-21).
- we rely on possessions to give us our greatest pleasure and satisfaction (1Tim. 6:17).

¹ John Blanchard, *Truth for Life* (Evangelical Press)

- we use what we have selfishly, or even in a way that is hurtful to others (James 5:1-6).
- we live as though our possessions are ours for ever (James 1:10-11).

3. What are right uses of our wealth?

We must honour our responsibilities to our family and to lawful authorities – e.g. taxes etc. (Rom.13:6-7; 1 Tim.5:8; Matt. 22:21).

We should use what we have to advance Christ's kingdom and to help the needy (Mal. 3:10; Gal. 2:10; 6:10). We may spend moderately on physical or cultural pursuits.

Theme II: How should Christians react to suffering?

1. Christians *must* expect to suffer.

We share the same possibilities of suffering from accidents and germs as people who are not Christians. In addition, we may be subject to satanic attacks and to the Lord's chastening.

2. We may be tempted to complain.

To ask "Why me?" or to fall into a sullen acceptance of what is happening to us. This is no better than the reaction of unbelievers.

3. We will benefit from suffering.

If we accept that our Heavenly Father has permitted our suffering for a wise and loving purpose (Heb.12:4-11).

If we examine ourselves to see if the Lord is directing us to deal with some sin in our lives. This is not necessarily so, but it may be (1 Co.11:29-32).

If we prove the reality of his strength by seeking his help to endure our suffering (Phil.4:12-13).

If we use our suffering to make us look forward to our entry into heaven's glory (Rom. 8:18).



Focus Point:

Suffering as a trial

James has been saying that Christian believers are to endure trials. Through trials will come blessing. The greatest blessing will be through the reception the believer will receive into heaven. Living for God in obedience to all his ways, through all the trials that this will

lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away." In Luke 8:13 Jesus simply says, "They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away." Those who have false faith are shown to be false when under test. When suffering comes to them they no longer follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

So in a very real way the trials Christian believers have to endure are a means of encouraging, rather than discouraging, their faith. We shall look into this in the following chapters as we examine some of the helpful truths and promises God has given in the Bible to help us at such times.

These notes on Suffering were taken from *The Christian and Suffering* from the Sound Words series. A copy of this booklet is available and can be obtained by writing to Grace Baptist Mission at the address given at the front of this book.



Over to you

What is your attitude to material comfort? It has been said that a pastor should live at about the average level of his congregation. Do you agree with this? Is it possible in your situation?

In your own ministry and that of your church, how much has the desire for money and wealth featured? Is God's work really held back because of a lack of material resources?

From this passage we have been studying, how will you counsel those in your flock who are poor? What about those who are wealthy?

who had been born blind, and when the disciples saw him they asked Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" They were really following the teaching of the religious leaders of their day. They reasoned that if death came into the world because of sin, then there can be no personal suffering without someone's doing wrong. They even taught that a child could commit some sin in its mother's womb before it was born, and that this would result in the baby's suffering in some way! Jesus' answer is interesting because it shows that this popular approach to suffering was quite mistaken. This is what he said, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened that the work of God might be displayed in his life." In other words, he was not born blind because either he or his parents had done something dreadfully wrong. Rather, it was going to be used by Jesus to bring glory to God. God was using this man's suffering to bring him great blessing. That was seen on that occasion by Jesus restoring the man's sight.

Those who quickly jump to the same conclusion as these disciples did can be very unkind to the person who is suffering by telling them they are guilty of something dreadful, when they may not be. Further, this kind of thinking fails to recognise something much more fundamental, for we are all sinners. We all do wrong, and sadly we have to say that we do so many times in a day. So to reason like that would mean either that we would all be in terrible agony or distress all the time, or that we were claiming to be perfect – which, of course, none of us is! There are, however, some occasions that are obviously the result of doing wrong, such as the punishment of Pharaoh in the book of Exodus. But it is not so in every case, and we need to be very careful before we make harsh statements about the reason why a particular person is suffering at any one time.

- ii. Having said that not all suffering is the direct result of someone's doing something wrong, there are times when it is. At this point we are referring specifically to Christian believers. Because God loves us, when we foolishly disobey him, then he may have to chasten us to correct us. This is the same way that all good parents discipline their children when they are naughty. There are times when God has to correct his children because we have done wrong. And so he "chastens" or "disciplines" us. And on occasions he uses suffering, and even persecution, to both correct us and instruct us so that we develop as godly Christians. So when a Christian be-

liever suffers, it is right that we examine our hearts to see if this has come upon us because of our foolishness. We need to ask, “What is the Lord teaching me? What is he saying to me? What does he want me to learn? Is there an area of my life that I need to put right?” And if there is, then we need to repent and ask for his forgiveness, remembering the Lord has brought affliction into our lives because he loves us. This will help us not to despair at such times, but to come to him confessing our guilt and seeking his mercy (1 John 1:5-10).

So we need to keep these two things in balance. Not all suffering is the direct result of some sin that we have personally committed, but some suffering is. With the latter, it is usually not very difficult, if we are Christian believers, to discover the reason. This is because we have new hearts that make us long to be like Jesus and we are, therefore, sensitive to sin in our lives.

We can see that Christians suffer because we live in a sinful world. We also suffer because God wants to glorify his name in our lives, and because God is making us more holy, more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

Suffering tests and strengthens true faith

In our study of James’ letter, we have seen that God allows and even sends suffering to us in order to test and strengthen our faith. Why does the faith of the Christian believer need to be tested? The answer to that is to see if it is a genuine faith. This is necessary because there is such a thing as false faith. This is counterfeit faith and, therefore, is not saving faith. For example, we can come across forged bank notes. They are not real and will not be accepted at a bank. It is like that with faith. It is something that can be copied so that it appears at first to be the real thing.

Now you may be wondering why anyone would want to copy true faith? There are really two main reasons.

- i. It is that old problem of sin again. Because of sin, the human heart does not want to accept what God has to say about it. For example, our pride hates owning up to being wrong. Yet in order to become a Christian believer, you must first of all admit that you are a sinner. But many people do not want to do that. So they pretend to be Christians, when they are not Christians at all! Because of sin the human heart is deceitful (Jer. 17:9). So our hearts can easily deceive us into thinking all is well with us and God when, in fact, it is not so at all.

- ii. The second reason for some people wanting to copy true faith is the work of Satan, the devil, the great enemy of God and men. We read about his activity in men’s hearts in 2 Corinthians 4:4 - Satan hates the Lord Jesus and, therefore, does his utmost to keep people from following him. One of the subtlest ways is that he tricks people into thinking what fine Christians they are, and what marvellous faith they have got, when they are not Christian believers at all! Satan is called the “father of lies” by Jesus in John 8, and that passage has a direct bearing on what we are discussing because Jesus was talking to very religious people who thought they were true believers.

That is why God tests believers to see if their faith is real, and at the same time to strengthen and encourage that faith. He uses suffering and trials to achieve this. This is brought out for us in 1 Peter 1. Peter had been writing about the salvation that God gives to all who truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And then he spoke about the trial or test of this faith in verses 6 and 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 by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.”* True faith is very precious, and it is trials of various kinds which demonstrate whether it is real or not, because true faith endures. It lasts. True believers still trust God even when they go through severe suffering. They do not give up following the Lord Jesus because of the difficulty that has come their way. Instead, they realise they have to trust him more, to keep them and help them through the trial. And the result of all this, of course, is that their faith is not weakened by the trial but strengthened. It is like our muscles that grow and develop when we exercise them and put them through hard work. So faith, when it is tried, is proved to be genuine.

The opposite is also true. Suffering exposes false or counterfeit faith. This is taught in the familiar parable that Jesus told about the sower. It is interesting that this parable is recorded by Matthew, Mark and Luke. This tells us something of its importance. In that parable Jesus likened those who listen to his teaching to four different types of soil. His teaching was that the seed and the soils showed the different responses of people to what Jesus taught. Now the rocky soil was described like this by Jesus in Matthew 13:20 onwards, *“The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he*

who does not change like shifting shadows.

The picture is of God as the creator of the sun, moon and stars. As the earth rotates, trees and buildings cast constantly changing shadows as they come between us and the sun. James is saying that no matter how the situation of our lives may change, God's purpose for us remains constant. God is not like the earth constantly moving and casting shifting shadows. God does not change (Mal. 3:6).

Verse 18

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth,

Do we need any further assurance of the Father's loving purpose for our lives? Then remember that he chose us, he set his love upon us in eternity (Eph.1:3) and gave us new life. This gift of new birth (salvation) is the greatest heavenly gift (from above) that we can receive. The Word of God is important in the process of our salvation. It is there that we see our need of Christ, and it is there that we see Christ as the only answer to our need. James is reinforcing the biblical teaching of God's acting first in our salvation. We are "born again" (we have new birth) because God so willed it by choosing us.² Will God now alter his purpose or give us up? (Rom.8:32). Surely not!

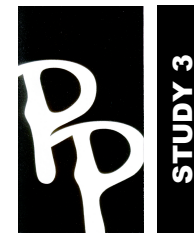
that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

When the people of Israel reaped their crops, they first gave a sample of the best of them to the Lord (Ex.23:16, 19:34, 22-26; Num.18:12). James told his readers that they were "a kind of firstfruits", meaning that they would be followed by a great harvest of believers. He also meant that God intended them to be godly and holy, the very best of all humankind. Because of James' emphasis on the practical aspects of the Christian life, some people have thought that he teaches salvation by works, but this verse shows that he is addressing people who are already Christians; he is not telling them how to become Christians. We must add that the kind of attitudes he is describing are only possible to those who are "born again", being the work of the Holy Spirit.

² See Focus Point 2 at the end of this study on the doctrine of Election.

DON'T BLAME GOD,

FOR HE IS GOOD



James 1:13-18

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point 1: Indwelling sin
- 📁 Focus Point 2: Election
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

The subject in verses 2-12 has been the testing of our faith by painful things that happen to us, such as persecution, poverty, illnesses or tragedy. The subject now is testing that comes to us in the form of temptation to sin. Trials can be looked upon as sent by God to make a person stand. Temptations are sent by Satan to make a person fall. Whilst we can distinguish trials and temptations in this way, the two are closely linked because every painful experience can be used as an excuse to sin, perhaps to doubt God, or to lower our standards of godliness. These verses explain that when we yield to temptation, we are responsible for doing so. They also direct us to God, whose purpose is for us to live holy lives.

What these verses mean

Verse 13

When tempted, no-one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;

Our lives are in God’s hands to direct and to oversee, so that we fulfil his purpose for us. But if, as a result of some painful experience, we yield to some temptation, we must not say that God made us sin. God does try us, but not with evil intent. For example, God clearly directed the life of Joseph (Gen. 37-50). He was put in a pit and then sold as a slave by his brothers (Gen. 37:12-28). He became a lord in Egypt and his brothers came face to face with him in great fear, but Joseph said to them, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good” (Gen. 50:20). Satan can use every trial we face to weaken our resolve to please God, as he used Potiphar’s wife to tempt Joseph to sleep with her (Gen. 39). God’s intention is always for our good. Whatever problem we face, we should always begin our thinking with the truth about God. So, when we are asking ourselves, “Why do I yield to temptation?” we begin our answer with the certain truth that such temptation cannot be from God, because it is completely impossible to incline God to evil of any kind. Not only so, God hates evil and is therefore incapable of inclining anyone else to what he himself hates.

Verse 14

but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

Men and women have always had a tendency to blame anyone or anything other than themselves when they yield to temptation. Some, as in verse 13, try to blame God: they argue either that God tested them too much, or that what they did was because of the way God made them. Others, like Eve and Adam, either put the blame on Satan or on other people (Gen. 3:6-13). In recent days there has been an increasing habit for people to blame their deprived circumstances for their wrongdoing. James will have none of this. He places the responsibility for wrongdoing on the wrongdoer and nowhere else. The picture he puts into our minds is of a fisherman trying to entice fish with the use of bait. A temptation put before us is like the bait which is cleverly selected to match known desires. We cannot be blamed for the presence of the temptation; as it is sometimes said, it is not sinful to be tempted. The bait is all around us! The problem begins when our hearts are drawn to what is put before us. Jesus taught that at this point we are already sinning (Matt.5:27-28).

Verse 15

Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

James sees sin in a believer’s life, not as something to excuse, but to loathe and even fear. He changes the picture to the process of birth. The bait or temptation in the previous verse incites a desire in the heart. The enticed heart is the “conception” which results in a “child” called sin. At this point, a believer will be enabled to renounce the sin (Rom.8:13; Col.3:5), and will ask God for his pardon and cleansing (1 John1:9). If the process continues and the sin is persisted with, we have to question if the person concerned is a true believer (1 John 3:9). If he is not, death follows with eternal condemnation.

Verse 16

Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers.

In the light of these solemn truths, James bares his pastoral heart and pleads for his readers to be warned and alert. Part of Satan’s strategy is to trick and falsify truth. The NIV translation we are using starts a new paragraph with this verse. So the warning of not being deceived is not just about temptation, but the truth that is expressed in 1:17-18. In other words James is saying that we must have the true assessment of the nature and character of God.¹

Verse 17

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights,

The link of verses 17 and 18 with what James has just said is not immediately obvious, but it is probable that James is turning his readers away from any tendency to complain against God because of their trials, or of blaming God for their weaknesses. In verse 17 burdened believers are reminded that God is unchanging in his willingness to give all they need “for life and godliness” (2 Pet.1:3). James describes God’s provision for all our needs as his giving “every good and perfect gift .. from above”. God’s gifts come from heaven and are not tainted like earthly gifts. People give gifts, but their motive for giving may not always be pure, or the gift may not be really suitable. However, all that God gives is always sincere, sensible, suitable and sufficient.

¹ John Blanchard, *Truth for Life* (Evangelical Press)



Summary

We see here two sides of the message addressed to Christian believers. There is the side of stern warning not to treat sin lightly or to presume on the mercy of God by a careless attitude to sin (1 Co.10:12). We must not blame anything or anyone else for our lapses into wrongdoing. On the other side, the message is reassuring. The God who has chosen us and given us new life will most certainly give us what we need, to persevere in every trial and to grow in strength and holiness. The Christian believer, whilst being the beneficiary of God's grace in his salvation, has the responsibility to cultivate a grateful heart and a godly life.



A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses

Theme: Dealing with sin in the Christian life

1. Unbelievers blame anything but themselves.
They excuse wrongdoing by referring to –
 - a. Environment – poverty, housing, culture.
 - b. Parents – inherited faults, lack of learning, abuse.
 - c. God – he made me like this so I cannot help it.
2. Christians grapple with the old nature.
 - a. Even as “born again”, we still have the residue of the old nature within us.
 - b. We must beware of allowing wrong desires to take hold of our minds.
 - c. When we commit sin, we must not excuse it, but put it to death and renounce it – take sides with God against it.
3. Our relationship with God must be restored.
 - a. We must ask for his pardon on the basis of Christ's death for us.
 - b. We must ask for the Spirit's help in cleansing our minds and hearts of every evil desire.
 - c. We must ask for strength to fight against evil.



Focus Point 1:

Indwelling sin

Sin began with the devil before Adam's fall in the Garden of Eden. The human race became sinful when Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the garden. Adam was the representative of the whole human race, which has been affected ever since from that time of testing in the Garden of Eden. God has looked upon every person as being guilty and consequently all suffer physical death as a direct result of sin.

People do not learn how to sin; it is part of their nature with which they are born. When David confessed his sin of adultery he said, "Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5). We have inherited this sinful nature (sometimes called "original sin"). We sin because we want to and not because somebody else forces us to. As sin stems from our nature and is not imposed from outside, we call it "indwelling sin".

Sin is opposition to God. It shows that people prefer to follow the devil and please themselves rather than to obey God. Every part of our being is affected; our intellect, desires, emotions, goals and motives. This does not mean that an unbelieving person cannot do good or that a person will always do the worst possible thing. What it does mean is that an unbeliever cannot do any spiritual good or be good in a relationship with God. (See Ephesians 4:18.)

When we are born again and come to faith in Jesus Christ, we are given a new nature that enables us to resist evil and to seek spiritual good.³ But we continue to be ensnared by indwelling sin, and we are still liable to choose to do wrong. For this reason we need to seek daily pardon and cleansing, and to grow in grace enabling us to overcome. When our lives are finished on this earth and we reach the glory, the conflict will cease for ever (Phil.1:6).

See also Study 22 in Book 3 of Galatians Preachers' Study Papers and the comments on Galatians 3:17.

³ A helpful book that is a practical guide to the subject of temptation the way Christians should deal with sin is *What Every Christian Needs to Know* (Grace Publications). A copy of this book can be obtained by writing to Grace Baptist Mission at the address given at the front of this book.



Focus Point 2:

Election

Our salvation began in eternity when God chose us to be his holy people (Eph.1:4). This choice was entirely in the mind and heart of God and had no basis at all in anything we would become (Rom.9:10-16). Jesus Christ died for the chosen ones, and the Holy Spirit brings them to ultimate holiness. We are not chosen for heaven without conversion and godly living; therefore this teaching must not be used as an excuse for continuing in sinful conduct.

See also Preachers' Study Papers on Galatians (Book 2, pages 145-6) and Obadiah and Malachi (page 48).



Over to you

It is very important for us as preachers to match our warnings to Christian believers with assurances of God's eternal, unfailing love. It is equally important for us to match our assurances of God's saving love and keeping power with warnings against using God's love as an excuse for carelessness about God's commands. Is your ministry balanced like this?

instructions with a complicated machine. So long as the instructions are followed, the machine works well and does not go wrong. We do well to search the Scriptures (John 5:39) regularly and diligently to discover God's purpose for our lives (Ps. 1:1-3).

and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does.

The process of reforming our lives into conformity to God's Word does not end until we reach the glory. There is always something to be done because, as we study the Scriptures, we discover new faults and sinful tendencies of which we had not been aware. But the process is not a miserable one (John 13:17); it is sin that robs us of joy, while holiness is the way to happiness.

Verse 26

If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

James has already mentioned the harm that can be done by the speedy use of the tongue (1:19-20), and he will expand on the subject later in his letter (3:1-12). Here, and in 1:27, his purpose is to show the emptiness of religion that is concerned mainly with external rituals and forms, which is the way many people today think of religion. But outward form should arise from inward spiritual grace and where this is absent the "religion" is worthless. At first sight this may seem to have nothing to do with the use of our tongues, until we realise that our words arise from our hearts as Jesus taught in Matthew 12:34. Very often, the first sign of grace in the heart is a refining of speech. The more we expose our hearts and minds to the Scriptures, the more we will be concerned with pure hearts that will then purify our words.

Verse 27

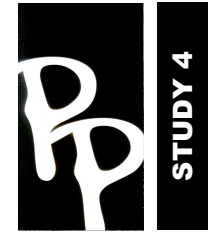
Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress

Again, at first sight this seems to be simply a matter of outward conduct. But by selecting orphans and widows, James has in mind those who are most deprived and defenceless, and who are the least able to call for help or to repay it. Such help arises from a heart of selfless love and sheer humility. Again, the more we search the Scriptures, the more we will discover that this is the way of godliness and Christlikeness (Ps.68:5; Matt. 25:36).

and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

It is all too easy to allow our thoughts and desires to be shaped by the prevailing habits of the ungodly people around us. By the "world"

THE RIGHTEOUS LIFE



James 1:19-27

This Study Paper contains the following :-

-  Introduction to the passage
-  What these verses mean
-  Summary
-  A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses
-  Focus Point: The world
-  Over to you

Introduction to the passage

James now begins to explore a whole range of aspects of the life of the Christian, which will take up the rest of the letter. The conduct and behaviour of the believer follows naturally from his reference to the new birth (1:18). Birth must lead to growth toward spiritual maturity (1:4). James likens this maturing life to the ripened harvest out of which the Israelites offered the best to God. In the verses of our study passage, he calls this the righteous life made clear in the Scriptures. Therefore it is to the Scriptures we must turn for direction into this righteous life. We must apply our minds to the Scriptures with diligence and then apply what we learn to ourselves and to our relationship with others.

What these verses mean

Verse 19

My dear brothers, take note of this:

James is now going to explore some details of the Christian life which he knows will lead to heart-searching, even resistance, so he wants them to be alert to what he is about to say.

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak

The Christian life is to be worked out in fellowship with other believers. This is one of the benefits of church membership. But this, in itself, is very testing and requires self-discipline. We may have a tendency to ignore other people's views and to try to impose our ideas on them. We must learn how to listen and how to choose the best time to speak.

and slow to become angry,

We may be tempted to anger if others do not listen to us, or reject what we say. But such anger arises from self-centredness and intolerance. The time may come when we must show "righteous anger", when God is being dishonoured or his truth is being denied, but we must not react quickly, and we must be sure that we are angry for God's glory and not for selfish pride.

Verse 20

for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

Anger in the heart, whether or not it is expressed in words or actions, is a blockage to spiritual progress. The way of blessing is through humility and meekness (Is. 66:2). Sinful anger is part of our old nature that must be discarded (Col. 3:8), if we desire to live in a way that pleases God.

Verse 21

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent,

Unconfessed sin and persistence in wrong-doing not only hinders our progress to spiritual maturity, it also provides a blockage to the mind and heart as we approach the Scriptures. Here James may have in mind sinful practices from the old way of life of his members. Such practices are not easy for people, reared in a very different society, to overcome. The idea is one of taking off dirty clothes (Rom. 13:11-14).

and humbly accept the word planted in you,

Before we became Christians, the Bible was simply a book we might read occasionally. When we are born again, the teaching of the Bible increasingly becomes a part of us, dominating our inner being, our minds, our hearts, our consciences. Our whole inner being gradually harmonises with God's Word as we give assent to it.

which can save you.

We may think of our salvation in three ways. First, we have been saved (past); through faith in Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven and we

have peace with God (Rom.1:16). Then when Jesus Christ returns (future), our salvation will be complete as every effect of sin in our souls and our bodies will be removed (Rom.13:11). In this verse we have the third way (present), which is a day by day experience of the work of the Holy Spirit giving us spiritual strength and enjoyment of the blessings Christ has prepared for us by his death.

Verse 22

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

This undoubtedly reflects the teaching of Jesus in such passages as Matthew 7:24-27 and Luke 11:28. Having introduced the "word" in verse 21, James now issues a warning. It is very easy to deceive ourselves that all is well with us simply because we listen to sermons, or read a part of the Bible each day. Hearing or reading God's Word and obeying it are equally important. If we try to live out the Christian life ("Do") without being directed by the Word, we will go astray. Likewise, if we listen to the Word without applying its teaching to our daily living, we will fail to live in a way that pleases God.

Verses 23 and 24

Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

We need to read the Bible (the "word") for all kinds of reasons, such as to find the knowledge of salvation, to enjoy God's promises to encourage us, to gain an understanding of God and his ways, and our hope for the future. But James reminds us of the importance of our faults being shown to us in the Bible, and our need to correct them. His illustration, taken from everyday life in the home, points out our tendency to agree with what the Bible says about us, to be sorry about it, and yet still not to do anything about it.

Verse 25

But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom,

Here is a helpful description of the "word". It is perfect (Ps. 19:7) because it gives to us the truth of God without error or defect of any kind (2 Tim.3:15-16). It also gives freedom because God knows what is good for us because he made us. People who are not Christian mistakenly think that the Bible robs them of their liberty. It certainly leads them away from a self-destructive way of life; but it leads to true freedom which results in life rather than death. It is like the book of

The future beyond this earth

The earth as it will be renewed by God after the end of the present earth (Rom. 4:13; Heb. 2:5).

Source: *A Dictionary of Bible Symbols* (Grace Publications) and *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker Books).



Over to you

What can you do to encourage your people to read the Bible regularly and systematically?

Is there a needy group of people near to your church that you and your people could help in some way?

James means the godless life and culture that clings around us and attacks us through our eyes and ears. The apostle Paul warns us against such things in Romans 12:2. We need to fill our minds and hearts with God's Word, and to do what it says!



Summary

“The righteous life that God requires” (1:20) could very well be a statement of James' theme in the whole of this letter, and here he touches on some aspects of this kind of life. A righteous life is one in which the temper and the tongue are under control, that outwardly is full of compassion and inwardly is resistant to evil influences. But what is the secret of such a life? A part of the answer is in the consistent reading of the Scriptures, and the diligent application of their teaching to every aspect of our lives.



A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses

Theme: The importance of the Bible in the Christian life

The Bible is one of God's most precious gifts to us. Without it we would not know the truth about him and about ourselves. Here we discover where we come from, why we are in the world, and our destiny.

It is important in the Christian life

1. For our spiritual growth – it is as necessary for our spiritual growth as our food is for our bodies (1 Pet. 2:2).
 - a. We learn about the Lord, all he has done for us, all he is doing for us now, and all he has promised to do.
 - b. We learn about ourselves and the areas of our lives that need correcting and cleansing (Ps. 119:9-11, 105).
2. For our consistent reading and diligent application.
 - a. Consistent reading means doing so regularly and being sure to cover the whole Bible over a period of time.

- b. Diligent application means that we ask the Lord to give us understanding and to make us willing for correction of our conduct and cleansing of our minds and hearts.
3. For the benefits we receive.
 - a. Freedom (1:25) – unbelievers are unwilling to be restricted to obedience to God’s laws. They want liberty to sin, but sin enslaves. The believer now has freedom to obey God, something we could not do before we were saved because we were slaves to sin.
 - b. Blessing – joy in ourselves and a blessing to other people. (Ps. 1:1-3).



Focus Point: The world

James concludes the study of this passage by urging believers to avoid being polluted by the world. James uses the word again in 3:6 to describe the tongue as a fire, “a world of evil among the parts of the body”. In the NIV translation the word “world” is used in different ways. In the original Hebrew and Greek more specific words are used to describe the different meaning of the English word “world”. In the King James (Authorised) translation of the Bible the word “earth” and “lands” is used in places where NIV uses “world”. In this Focus Point we consider the different meanings in the Bible of the word “world”.

Planet earth

The most obvious meaning is the planet on which we live. God owns it (Gen. 1:1) and everything it contains (Ps. 24:1), loves it (John 3:16) and keeps it going (Col. 1:17). It is the physical realm and contrasts with that of heaven. The word “world” is used to describe the varied make-up of this physical earth.

The planet with its topographical features as habitable and fruitful (Ps. 90:2)

The place of human habitation (1 Co. 5:10)

The material world (Rom. 1:20)

“Ends of the world” is used to mean everywhere in the whole physical earth (Ps. 19:4; Rom. 10:18).

The Hebrews thought in terms of the heavens (the place where God lived) and the earth (the realm of human existence). The Greeks used the word *kosmos*, which became used for the universe. The New Testament writers followed the Hebrew thought and used the word *kosmos* to generally describe the earth and not the universe. However, these writers did not limit themselves in using *kosmos* to mean the physical world, but also to describe the human race who occupied the physical world and also the system that is opposed and hostile to God.

Human life on the planet

- All people of the world including every single individual (Gen 11:1; Matt. 13:38).
- People representing all races, nationalities and classes (Ex. 34:10; John 4:42).
- The human race as a whole, not including every individual. In John’s Gospel the emphasis is on lostness, antagonism towards God. It is a description of quality rather than quantity (Matt. 26:13; Mark 16:15; John 1:9; James 2:5).
- A figure of speech to describe a large majority of people or the most significant part of the world’s population known to the writer at the time (Gen. 41:57; John 7:4).
- This present life contrasted with heaven or hell or the world to come (John 6:14; 10:36; 11:27; Heb. 1:6).

Mankind under the power of sin and Satan

The world of human beings in rebellion against God. This world is controlled by the evil one (1 John 5:19), but the followers of Christ do not belong to this world (John 15:19). Satan rules this kingdom, which appears to be large and very efficient (Eph. 6:12). It dominates the life of unsaved humanity. However, though this kingdom has spoilt that which was created, God is sovereign and permits Satan’s kingdom to exist for a time. God has provided a way of reconciliation for the world (i.e. people representing all races etc.) whereby men can transfer from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God (2 Co. 5:19).

Further uses of the word “world” of human beings in rebellion are:-

- Material possessions, the cares and pleasures of this life. Excessive attachments to these things are sinful and a snare to be avoided (Mark 8:36; 2 Tim. 4:10).
- The substitution of the word “world” for a whole and vast complex subject. In James 3:6 world is used for sinful human speech.

truths. Firstly, God's sovereign right and secondly, the present and future riches for the believer.

Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world

It is our common experience that of the two visitors to the church, the one in shabby clothes is more likely to be a believer than the other. In our Lord's teaching the poor would more readily receive the gospel than the rich (Matt. 19:16-26; Luke 6:20). This is largely because, naturally, the rich do not realise a sense of need so often as do the poor. This principle is clearly seen in the state of the church throughout the world. The church is more vibrant and populous in societies of weaker economies than in developed, rich societies. But it is important to compare Scripture with Scripture, and to see that some rich people are also "rich toward God", such as Abraham (Gen. 13:6) and Job (1:1-3; 42:12-16). In 1 Corinthians 1:26 Paul does not say that "not any" great people were saved, but he says "not many". Although there are natural explanations why it is largely the poor who are saved, James tells us here that the basic reason is that God chose them to be "rich in faith". The idea is not that God chose them because they loved him, but in order that he would cause them to love him. (See the Focus Point 2 in Study Paper 3 about Election.)

to be rich in faith

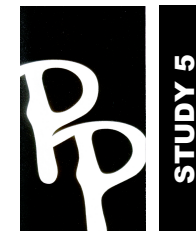
People are not chosen because they are rich in faith but they are chosen to be rich in faith. Faith is given as a gift and is a result of God's grace. Grace is not a reward, but undeserved favour that a higher being shows to a lower creature. The God-given faith enables the recipient (Christian) to see more and more the truth of Christ. In our knowledge and speaking of him we become enriched (1 Co. 1:5). A person who has a small grain of faith, sufficient to see that Christ has died in his place and therefore trusts him as Saviour, is already richer than the wealthiest sinner in the world.²

and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?

Believers are chosen to inherit the kingdom of God. This is certain. The kingdom that believers inherit is the sphere in which Christ rules. This is invisible to the world now (John 18:36), but when Christ returns, this kingdom will be visible in the new heaven and earth (2 Pet. 3:13). God will be there and a continuing relationship will exist between the believer and God at a level that the Christian never knew before. There will be no need for faith because we will see God. There

² John Blanchard, *Truth for Life* (Evangelical Press)

FAVOURITISM IS SINFUL



James 2:1-7

This Study Paper contains the following :-

-  Introduction to the passage
-  What these verses mean
-  Summary
-  A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses
-  Over to you

Introduction to the passage

James now turns his attention to the sin of favouritism in which more respect is shown to rich people or those in high position than to poor people who have no power or authority. In our note on 1:21 we suggested that new Christians are prone to carry old habits into their new life. Such things often take a long time to correct. It may be that one of these habits was to honour the rich and despise the poor, and that this needed correction. In 1:27 James says that we must look after those who are poor and needy. We are certainly not doing this if we treat them without respect; rather, this means we are "polluted by the world" (1:27). So James is very stern in his attack in these verses on sinful favouritism.

What these verses mean

Verse 1

My brothers,

The use of this phrase usually indicates the introduction of a new subject or a new slant on a subject being discussed. It also shows the warmth of James to those to whom he is writing. It emphasises the relationship he has with them.

as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ,

James could have easily written, “My brothers, don’t show favouritism.” Yet James inserts this little phrase asserting their profession of faith. The way the phrase was originally written in Greek has caused some interesting discussion points amongst translators. The point to note about this phrase is the emphasis on what is to follow. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who shows all the glory of his Father and heaven, did not distance himself from men. He willingly came down from heaven, in all his perfection, to this earth. He mixed willingly with all types and classes of people. The religious leaders criticised Jesus for doing this (Matt. 9:11). Now James is going to make the point that if the Son of God did not discriminate between different classes of people, nor should his followers.

don’t show favouritism.

Any kind of bias in favour of people because of their wealth, position or fame is sinful because every human person is of equal worth in God’s sight. The people of Israel had to learn this (Deut.1:17), and the apostle Peter had to learn it (Acts 10:34), but because of our sinful hearts, the lesson has to be frequently repeated. Here James insists that faith in Jesus Christ and favouritism are contradictory. Jesus Christ is a glorious Lord, and his glory was displayed in a state of humility, poverty and rejection (John 1:14). If his followers are not to be hypocrites, they will never show more respect to one class of people above another. This is at least part of what Paul meant in 2 Corinthians 5:16 – favouritism is “worldly” and must be shunned.

Verse 2

Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in.

Having stated a basic rule in verse 1, James, as a good teacher, now gives an example that his readers would easily understand. He sets before his readers a practical illustration that could happen in any local church setting. Two strangers arrive. One is clearly wealthy because of the clothes and jewellery he is wearing. The other is poor. They present a total contrast, one in rings the other in rags.

Verse 3

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,”

Notice the way they were treated. The rich man was offered a good seat whilst the poor man was not shown any interest and was told he

could stand in a particular place or sit on the floor.¹ Whilst James has invented this scene he knows that he is describing reality. James is exposing a sin that is found in all societies of the world. We make assessments upon a person’s financial resources and not their moral qualities. If we perceive that they are wealthy we pander to them. If they seem to have no possessions we ignore and disregard them. Does this not happen in our local congregations today? We may not be so obvious in our actions, but our thoughts follow James’ illustration.

Verse 4

have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

To discriminate is to think more highly of one thing or kind of person than another. When we do this, we expose whether our thinking is guided by Scripture or by worldly standards. The Bible teaches that all people are made by God and in his image (Gen.1:27), which means that we all have some reflection of our maker. Therefore no one is to be despised because of poverty, ignorance, colour or anything else. It is true that parents are to be obeyed, and rulers are to be honoured, but that is only because of their responsibilities. In the same verse that Peter says, “Honour the king,” he also says, “Show proper respect to everyone” (1 Pet. 2:17). When we judge other people on the basis of outward appearances, we are guilty of “moral filth” (1:21), from which we must be cleansed (John 7:24).

Verse 5

Listen, my dear brothers:

James expresses himself more affectionately than he did in 2:1. He has just drawn attention to their sin. He is not pleased with their behaviour, but in his rebuke he shows his deep and personal affection for them. The pastoral heart will rebuke and correct the sinner yet love the person who has committed the sin. The phrase also draws the attention of James’ readers to a theological statement that he is about to make. It is in the form of a question and will state two important

¹ Local Christian congregations differ in the way they gather for worship. In some cultures there is a mixture of people sitting on chairs and benches whilst others sit on the floor on mats. James is not referring to such arrangements at all. How a congregation organises its gathering is its own decision. The point that has to be remembered is that there is consistency in the way things are done. For example, if it is the practice that all girls and single young women sit on floor mats then it would be wrong for one such person to be suddenly asked to take a seat elsewhere because she might be wearing nice, expensive clothes.

will be no need for hope for what we longed for will have been realised. But there will be love (1 Co. 13:8-10). Heaven for the Christian will be the deepest relationship he has ever known.³

Verse 6

But you have insulted the poor.

It seems that James was aware of specific cases of the kind of discrimination he is condemning as an insult. In the light of the example he used of the two men (2:2-3) and the teaching of 2:5, James is saying that the way they have treated the poor is a direct contradiction of the will of God. They had decided that the poor man was not worthy to sit on a seat with them in church, yet God had chosen them to be with him in the heavenly realms.

Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?

The insult is made more painful if it involves favouring the very kind of people who are persecuting the churches. Every generation of Christians has experienced oppression of some sort by the wealthy, who tend to be in positions of authority. The apostle Paul was guilty of this before he was converted (Acts 8:3; 1 Tim.1:13), and it was the constant experience of the early church (Acts 4:1-3, 13:50, 16:19, 19:23-41). Why would the rich and influential behave this way? Because they were unconverted. The gospel would have challenged their consciences over their wealth and pride. Those in religious high positions would have been alerted to the emptiness of their rituals and ceremonies.

Verse 7

Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?

This is the climax of their crime. They not only drag God's people into court but bring the Lord's name into contempt. This makes showing favouritism to rich people even more unthinkable. The name of Jesus is always precious to believers and they are hurt when the ungodly speak ill of Christ. Christians take Christ's name to themselves when they are baptised as believers (Gal.3:27). By behaving the way they did, the Christians to whom James was writing would have been bringing the name of Christ and their own witness to him into disrepute. They were being inconsistent. That same danger exists for Christians today.

³ Ibid



Summary

These verses teach us the great importance of the quality of our church life. Christ is the Head of the church, and our conduct in every part of our local church must be under his control and guided by the Scriptures. The result will be a community that has completely different standards from any other club or society. One aspect of that difference will be our attitude to other people. This is part of what Paul means in 2 Corinthians 5:16; we will see every person, no matter what their outward appearance, as someone made by God and who needs Jesus Christ for salvation.



A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses

Theme: Discrimination is an evil to be renounced

By discrimination is meant any tendency to treat some people with favouritism and not others, on the basis of physical appearance, education, class, colour or nationality. We must declare that all people are equal before God, and honour that declaration in practice.

I In all our dealings with other people

This must be so because we are all created by God and in his image.

1. We are all made by God

This is contrary to the idea of evolution that teaches the survival of the fittest. This teaching leads to the idea that some people are superior to others.

2. We are all made in the image of God (Gen.1:27)

- a. Distinct from animals, we can reason and create, and we know right from wrong.
- b. To discriminate is to insult our maker whose image we all bear.

II In church life

Christians, who should know better, are too often guilty of discrimination in church life.

1. We do this when –

- a. We are more friendly to people we like than to others.

- b. We more readily welcome rich, respectable, educated people, than others.
- c. We appoint such people to positions of leadership, even though they are not so spiritually minded as others.

2. When we do this we forget –

- a. That we are all sinful and in need of salvation.
- b. That none of us are saved because of any virtue in us.
- c. That we are all totally dependent on Jesus Christ and his sacrifice for sinners.



Over to you

Are there people in your church and congregation who are given less attention because they are less attractive?

When you have to address a person who has sinned, in what spirit do you do it?

How do you give responsible tasks to those in your congregation? Is it because you like them, they are influential, you get on with them? What do you think your criterion should be?

yet continue to live as though it does not apply to us. This seems to have been a fault among the dispersed Jewish believers. Paul had to write along similar lines to the Jewish Christians in Rome (Rom. 2:17-24). So James insists that we need both to know what God requires of us and to act upon it. But we must not only seek to obey the law, we must do so with diligence and zeal because at the judgement our lives will be assessed on the basis of God's law. Since we are believers in Christ, and have been saved from the wrath to come, this judgement is not with a view to condemnation and banishment, but to the rewards we shall enjoy in the new heaven and earth (1 Co. 3:12-15; 2 Co. 5:10; Rev.22:12). In being judged, the believer will have to account for his life. This may include, sadly, a life that has grieved God. The result may be seen more in losses than rewards. The judgement that is to take place is based upon "the law that gives freedom". This phrase has already come up in 1:25 (Study 4). James is using this phrase in the context of writing to believers and is meaning that they will be judged in the light of the gospel. This "law" has already freed the believer from the curse of the law and all its requirements. He now has life and not death.

Verse 13

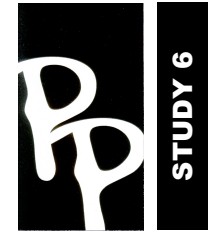
Because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful.

This clearly reflects the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5:7 and 6:14-15. Any person who is a true Christian will be merciful towards other people in kindness and forgiveness. This means that if we are not merciful we lack a sign of being born again, and therefore will come under God's judgement. Trusting in Christ must not lead us to be careless about obedience to God. Paul tells us that the reason for our salvation is "that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us" (Rom. 8:4).

Mercy triumphs over judgment!

For the person who knows that in his heart he has been changed from a selfish person to someone who shows mercy there is that confidence that the mercy of God he has experienced will prevail on Judgement Day. No Christian will be able to face that day and deserve to stand in God's presence. God's mercy will triumph over the judgement that his people ought to face. If we fail, and seek God's pardon, he is ready to show mercy. He delights in mercy (Mic. 7:18).

CHRISTIANS AND GOD'S LAW



James 2:8-13

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point 1: God's law in the Christian life
- 📁 Focus Point 2: Rewards for Christians
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

It is important to remember that James is writing to Jewish Christian believers, people who were chosen by God to salvation, and given new life through the power of the gospel (1:18). He is not teaching them how to become Christians, but how they should live as Christians. If we forget this, we will think that these verses teach that the way to become a Christian is to obey God's law. But this would contradict what we find in the rest of Scripture, that we are saved by faith and not by obedience to the law of God (John 3:16; Eph.2:8-9; Gal.3:10-11). James teaches that because we are Christians, we must not only respect God's law, but we must pay attention to every detail of it. His readers may have thought that avoiding favouritism was not very important, but this is not so. Here James insists that all God's requirements are to be honoured and none can be overlooked.

What these verses mean

Verse 8

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbour as yourself,” you are doing right.

James is saying that if we treat other people with equal respect we are acting in harmony with the law of God in Leviticus 19:18. He calls it “the royal law” because Jesus Christ, who is the King, endorsed this rule as basic to all human relationships (Mark 12:29-31). It sums up all the laws in the second part of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:8-17). To love ourselves is not to indulge in proud self-congratulation, which is sinful. Rather it means that we should remember that our lives, bodies and souls, are God’s gift to us, and that therefore we should give ourselves such care and attention as makes us pleasing to him. The teaching is that this is what we should have in mind in our relationship with other people. Jesus answered the question, “Who is my neighbour?” in Luke 10:25-37.

Verse 9

But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as law-breakers.

In the course of a whole range of instruction about relationships (Lev.19:9-18), the Lord says, “Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly” (Lev. 19:15) and then, “Love your neighbour as yourself” (Lev. 19:18). Similarly, James moves from the sin of favouritism towards the rich to all forms of bias for unworthy reasons. If his readers should be tempted to think lightly of such matters, he reminds them, in very plain language, that this is a matter of God’s law, and that is always serious. Note the emphasis on the words “sin” and “law-breakers”. In the original Greek they convey the idea of being “short of the mark” and “stepping over the line”. Favouritism is looked upon by God as falling short of his standard and the one who commits it is punishable as one who has trespassed, stepped over the marked boundary.

Verse 10

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

Not only must we realise the importance of the law about loving our neighbours, but James takes the opportunity to insist that every part of God’s law is to be taken seriously. This is in complete harmony with our Lord’s teaching in Matthew 5:17-20. It is also confirmed by the

fact that though Adam disobeyed God at one point, the consequences were devastating and universal as Paul tells us in Romans 5:18-19. We must remember that the law is a reflection of the perfect character of God, so if we say that one part is not important we are detracting from God’s perfection. The law of God is not like a pile of stones where one stone taken will not be missed. It is more like a chain where one severed link breaks the whole chain. Another comparison would be that of one small puncture which produces a flat tyre and makes it dangerous and unusable.

Verse 11

For he who said, “Do not commit adultery”, also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a law-breaker.

The principle of “one sin results in the whole of the law being broken” set out in 2:10 is now backed up by a practical illustration in this verse. It dismisses any idea that bad deeds can be cancelled out by good deeds. James takes two of the Ten Commandments, murder and adultery, to make the point unmistakably clear. A murderer cannot claim that he has not broken God’s law because he has not committed adultery. Of course Jesus taught that a lustful look meant that the sin of adultery had already been committed in the heart (Matt. 5:28). Likewise, being angry and resentful with someone is committing murder in the heart (Matt. 5:21-22). As we get hold of these truths we come to understand that in practice the more we try to keep the whole law, the more we realise how much we fail. The Christian is so thankful that he is covered with the perfect righteousness of Christ.¹ This does not excuse him, as he continues to be under the moral obligation to obey every part of God’s law. The law, however, does not save a person or keep them. That is all done by grace through faith in Christ. The righteousness comes from Christ and not by obeying the law. The teaching of these verses can be used in evangelism to people who are not Christians. They very often claim to keep some laws, while they forget those laws they know and do break.

Verse 12

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom,

It is all too easy to speak about the law of God without acting upon it. We might study God’s law, and discuss it with much enthusiasm, and

¹ This is known as the doctrine of Justification. See the Focus Point on page 59 of the Preachers’ Study Papers on Galatians (Book 1).

for eternity. The level of reward will not affect our happiness. It is our worldly perception that happiness is based upon what we possess or the power we wield. True happiness comes from delighting in God and rejoicing in the status and recognition that he has given to the believer. Differing rewards will not mean differing states of happiness; otherwise there would not be full happiness in heaven. Those with greater rewards and honour, nearer to the throne, will not delight in their status but only in the privilege of falling down before God to worship him (Rev. 4:10-11).

4. The greatest reward for all will be God himself

Whatever our understanding of heavenly rewards that await all Christians, we are in no doubt that the greatest reward will be God himself (Gen. 15:1; Rev. 21:3). We will never tire of worshipping God; our worship will be continuous and joyful. We will be overwhelmed by his presence and our response will not need the prompting that we currently experience on the present earth. We will burst out with unending praise of God's holiness and his worthiness to receive glory, honour and power.



Over to you

Does your ministry maintain an equal stress on our freedom from the law for our salvation and on the requirement that as Christians we must seek to obey God's law?

Are there people in your congregation who are trying to gain salvation by keeping God's law? From this study how would you teach such a person that they will not succeed?

How much do your people understand the mercy of God? It may be that a lack of understanding this and how we do not receive the judgement that we deserve is a cause for great misunderstanding.



Summary

James has been dealing with behaviour towards our fellow men. His teaching began in 2:1 and he is condemning attitudes and behaviour based on worldly standards. In the first part of chapter 2 James tackles favouritism. Now he examines this behaviour in direct relationship to God's law. The Christian is a person who, through faith in Jesus Christ, has been saved from God's condemnation, and no power on earth can alter that fact. But this does not mean that we can be careless about any part of God's law or any part of the Bible. We will come before God at the judgement when Jesus returns, not to be condemned, but to give an account of our lives as Christians, and receive our reward, according to our faithfulness. In the accounting the Christian will know of his failures and there will be reliance upon mercy. In all this God's mercy will rise above judgement for he is a merciful God.



A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses

Theme: Christian compassion – Showing mercy

Introduction

- i. The world tends to be a very harsh place. Rich countries are not very concerned for others. There is much exploitation of drink and drugs, careless of their dire effects.
- ii. Many of the works of compassion that does exist in the world were begun by Christians. For example, hospitals.
- iii. Christians must be known for their kindness and the mercy they show to others.

I Why Christians should be merciful

1. Because that is the character of the God we worship.
2. Because that is the teaching of our Lord and his apostles.
3. Because we have received mercy through the death of Christ for us.

II How Christians should show mercy

1. In pity for those who are needy.
2. In forgiveness for those who offend us.
3. In spreading the gospel for rescuing people who are under the wrath of God.



Focus Point 1:

God's law in the Christian life

How can it be scriptural to say that Christians are under the law? Is James bringing us back into bondage from which Christ liberated us? What place has “law” in the life of the Christian?

The first twenty chapters of Exodus are a huge, God-given, visual aid on this subject. When the story begins, our ancestors were slaves in Egypt; at the end (Ex.19-20) they are a free people, camped at the mount of God, Mount Sinai. It was not by accident that they arrived there – notwithstanding that the Lord brought them out of Egypt in order to bring them into Canaan. When he sent Moses on his mission of liberation, the Lord gave him this assurance, “And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain” (Ex.3:12). From the start, then, the Lord intended Mount Sinai as a primary destination. He took the wonderful step of acting as his people's guide, in the pillar of cloud and fire (Ex.13:17-22), in order to guarantee that they would arrive there.

Here then is our visual aid, drawn in the vivid colours of history. The first act of God is to redeem his people (Ex.6:6). Then he brings his people to the place where he reveals his law to them (Ex.20:1). To put the matter another way: those who have experienced the benefit of the blood of the lamb (Ex.12:13; 21-23) must come under obedience to the law. God the Redeemer and God the Law-giver are the same. Grace comes first, the law follows.²

See also the Focus Point on The Law of Christ in Galatians Study 24 (Book 3, pages 242-3).

² John Blanchard, *Truth for Life* (Evangelical Press) quoting Motyer.



Focus Point 2:

Rewards for Christians

The Bible teaches that there will be rewards at the return of Jesus Christ for those who serve him faithfully (1 Co. 3:12-15; Col. 3:23-24; Matt. 19:27-29). This subject needs to be understood in the context of God's final judgement. The Bible teaches that this will occur as part of Christ's return to earth. Jesus Christ will be the judge (Matt. 25:31-33. John 5:27, Acts 10:42, 2 Tim. 4:1). Unbelievers will be judged by what they have done and this will include degrees of punishment (Matt. 11:22, Luke 12:47-48, Rev. 20:12,13). Believers too will appear before the judgement seat of God (Rom. 14:12). In Matthew 25:31-46 Jesus teaches that on Judgement Day believers will be separated from unbelievers and believers will be rewarded with Christ's blessing.

There is uncertainty as to exactly what is meant by rewards and what form they will take, but the following is generally agreed –

1. There is no credit to us

There are no rewards in the usual sense, because whatever we do is in the Lord's strength and by his grace. Our works of love and mercy are not the grounds of our confidence that will justify us in God's sight. Rather, these works are proof of the greater mercy already shown to us.

2. Rewards are an incentive

Nevertheless, the promise of rewards is an incentive to faithfulness and godliness (Phil. 3:12-14; Heb. 10:35). Understanding this truth should help believers to encourage each other that all may increase their heavenly reward (Heb. 10:24-25). This should motivate a believer to wholeheartedly work for the Lord at whatever task the Lord calls him to do. The believer then seeks that his reward is not wealth or success, but the Lord's approval. God's capacity to bring blessing to all his children is unlimited. There is no danger that it will run out and all will be used up.

3. No loss but fulness of life

There will be no sense of loss in heaven; all will enjoy fulness of life (Ps. 16:11; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12). Although there will be degrees of reward in heaven, the joy of each person will be full and complete

in God, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that there is a judgement to come. Here is an implied warning that if we do not have a living, saving faith, but only a basic belief in God and nothing more, we too should tremble, for we are, in that case, under God's condemnation (John 3:36).

Summary



We learn from these verses that faith and deeds are both required, and that their order is equally important. James' main point is the necessity of deeds that confirm the existence of faith; faith alone is not enough. But it is also true that deeds without faith are unacceptable to God. The life that pleases God is one that is energised by faith and gives God the glory. So we see that faith must come first and that it is confirmed by a life of love to God and to all humankind. We have also seen that James' teaching is entirely in harmony with that of Paul; there is no contradiction.



A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses

Theme: Church members should be true Christians

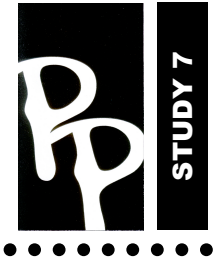
In our zeal for our church to increase in numbers, we need to take great care that those we receive have true faith.

I The evidence of true faith

Trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour will show itself –

1. In zeal for the worship of God in prayer and praise and love for his church.
2. In love for God's people expressed in fellowship and in caring for those in need.
3. In love for the unconverted expressed in good deeds and gospel witness.

DEFECTIVE FAITH



James 2:14-19

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: Faith
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

We are discovering that James is not following a logical argument, but his method is to allow one theme to suggest another. In these verses there is a continuing theme of love for others, but the immediate connection is with James' words in verse 12, "Speak and act." Here the thought is that talking about God's law while not obeying it is wrong. This leads on to the folly of saying that we have faith, whilst we are not doing anything about it. James uses practical love to those in need as a specific example of how this faith is to be demonstrated. This call for action as a proof of faith applies to every aspect of the Christian life worked out in love for others.

What these verses mean

Verse 14

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?

Some people have wrongly thought that James is here teaching that the possibility of salvation, acceptance with God, is on the basis of what

we do. James is entirely in harmony with Jesus (John 6:47) and Paul (Eph.2:8-9) in his assertion that we are saved through faith. The point he is bringing to our attention is that it is important to be sure of the nature of the faith that saves, and that his readers possess it. In this verse James requires us to examine ourselves. If we claim to have faith, but this does not affect the kind of life we live, he challenges us to ask ourselves if this is true faith, saving faith. Our deeds (often referred to as “works”) are not the means that bring us salvation but they are the evidence of it. James in raising this matter of faith and deeds does so in the form of two questions. He will give us an answer in the form of three arguments to emphasise the importance of faith and deeds working together.

Verse 15

Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.

To help us understand the question and to arrive at the right conclusion, James gives us an illustration using the necessities of everyday life. We are left to assume that the person here is a Christian and that the action is within church life. This practical demonstration is his first argument and deals with the emptiness of good wishes.

Verse 16

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?

James’ thinking is often centred on care for the needy (2:8), and here he is compelling us to see that a profession of faith that is not accompanied by practical concern for the needs of others is completely without value. What good is it? This is teaching by one who is very familiar with principles laid down by Jesus Christ (Matt. 7:21), and who is in complete harmony with the apostle Paul (Gal. 5:6). As someone has said, “The belly is not filled with words.” If our thoughts are to be of any value then they have to be accompanied by action. Words may show that we have knowledge; the accompanying action shows that we have understood the truth and that our hearts are in harmony with the faith we profess with our lips.

Verse 17

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Now comes the second line of argument in answer to the questions posed in verse 14. It touches our hearts and consciences. Here James is making a clear distinction between something that is called faith but is not saving faith. The key word is “dead”. There is an intellectual

faith in which people believe the facts about the Christian faith without having a personal faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The difference between them is the difference between life and death. Saving faith unites us to Jesus Christ; it is energised by his Spirit and issues in a life of love toward God, his people and the world at large. In comparison with this intellectual faith is dead. James gives us an illustration of this in the next verse.

Verse 18

But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”

It is difficult to be sure how this verse is to be understood. There were no punctuation marks in the original Greek manuscript, and we are dependent on the translators to use their skill to help us. Even then, they cannot tell us who “someone” is, or exactly what these words mean. The best we can do is to suggest that the “someone” is an imaginary person that James is using for the sake of argument. This imaginary person is saying that we do not need to put faith and deeds together. One has faith, another his deeds, and we should not criticise one or the other. What is James’ answer to that idea?

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.

In reply to this imaginary person, James is saying, “The kind of faith you are talking about is useless. I am writing about something that is entirely different and that is completely inseparable from the kind of life to which it leads.” He is also saying that if it could be proved that anyone is not living a life of love to others, then he or she does not have saving faith. The absence of deeds proves the absence of faith.

Verse 19

You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.

Here is James’ third line of argument to the question of verse 14 of the person who claims to have faith but has no deeds. It deals with our relationship or communion with God. Whatever kind of faith we have, it is grounded in something or someone. There are many people in the world who reject idolatry and the worship of man-made or natural objects, such as the sun or the stars. Many believe in a creator God who is all powerful and all wise. This is good, so far, but it does not have the dynamic to lead to a life of love to God and to all humankind. James underlines this by showing that such “faith” is no different from that possessed by evil spirits. We can confirm this by reference to Matthew 8:29. In that text we see that evil spirits believe

What these verses mean

Verse 20

You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

James seems to have learnt from experience that the people to whom he wrote were either slow to understand what he was saying, or slow to apply it to themselves. There is always a danger with religious people that they separate their religion from their daily life. James calls such people “foolish”. Here he calls faith without works useless in the sense of “barren” – like the fig tree in Mark 11:12-13 failing to bear any fruit. The person James has in mind is someone who has a lot to say, but who has little to show. There is eloquence and ignorance, because the Holy Spirit has not enlightened the mind and the person remains in spiritual darkness. One commentator describes this kind of person as the spiritually ignorant windbag.

Verse 21

Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?

To prove his point, James goes back into the Old Testament and brings out two incidents. The first one concerns Abraham when God told him to take his son Isaac to Mount Moriah and sacrifice him there. James asks the question, “Was not Abraham considered righteous for what he did?” What did James mean? Is he really saying that God declared Abraham as being righteous because of what he did on Mount Moriah? The answer is no. These verses must be looked at from the point of view of faith and not of good deeds.

Verse 22

You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.

The incident with Isaac, to which James refers, was one of action. This followed on much later to the time when Abraham believed in God’s promise that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. It was then that God credited Abraham with being righteous (Gen. 15:6). Now James is putting these two things (faith and works) together and says that by this Abraham’s faith was made “complete”. This means precisely what James has been teaching. The faith that saves is a faith that bears fruit. When this fruit is seen faith is fulfilled, which means it is proved to be real or complete. This is why he says that Abraham was “considered” righteous for what he did – he was

II The importance of this evidence

If we receive those who do not show this evidence –

1. We deceive them into thinking they are Christians when they are not.
2. We endanger the life of the church with worldliness, differences and disunity.
3. We fail to show the world the evidence of true Christianity and we will fail to make an impact on the thinking of the ungodly.



Focus Point:

Faith

Faith consists of three elements –

- The knowledge of the facts
- An acknowledgement that the facts are true
- A personal trust and commitment to the fact that those facts are true

Biblically, faith is the conviction that God exists, that he is completely reliable and will do everything he has promised. This faith obeys God, who requires us to accept Jesus Christ as his Son and our Saviour. This acceptance is to trust what God says about his Son in his Word (Bible) and believe these facts about Christ. No one can be a Christian without this faith. It is through faith in Christ alone that sinners are put right with God.

If we are to understand what James is saying in the passage of this study, we need to be clear as to what he means by faith that anyone may claim to have. It is possible that not all three elements are present. So we find that there are a number of different kinds of faith, which are not the faith that can save a person.

We may speak of *natural* faith. We exercise this when we trust a chair enough to sit on it, or we trust a bus enough to travel on it.

We may speak of an *historic* faith. We exercise this when we believe all the Bible tells us about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, but we do not come to trust in Jesus Christ for salvation (John 2:23-25). We may speak of an *intellectual* faith; this is when we believe in God and that he created all things, but do not come to faith in Christ.

We may speak of *superstitious* faith. This is when people say, “I have faith” and believe that somehow their problems will end and that God will receive them.

We may speak of a *religious* faith, when people go through religious ceremonies and rituals, believing that this will earn for them some eternal reward.

We may speak of *saving* faith. This is the gift of God and it means that we are trusting in Jesus Christ alone, his life, death and resurrection. We are sure of God’s pardon and being rescued from the wrath of God. The evidence of this faith will be a life of love.



Over to you

Examine your own heart and what you believe. What kind of faith do you have?

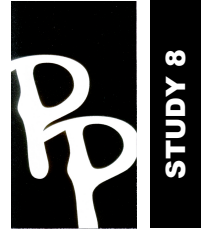
How do you encourage your people to declare their faith? Is it based upon the emotions and feelings at the end of a service? If it is, how will they have come to that conviction of the facts they have heard, to accept and trust in them?

Does your teaching set out the facts of biblical truth for your people to hear?

It is possible to make the process of entry into a local church so easy as to admit the unconverted, or so hard as to exclude genuine believers. Does your practice fail one way or the other?

LIVING FAITH;

IT HAS TO WORK



James 2:20-26

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
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- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

James is still compelling us to think seriously about the true nature of the faith that arises from being born again and which unites us to Jesus Christ. Whilst our reconciliation to God (through justification) is received through faith, without any reference whatever to works, that faith will always show itself in love toward God and toward other people. So important does he consider this theme that he turns now to two challenging illustrations. The first one is from the life of Abraham, who was honoured by the Jews as the founder of their nation, so James’ readers would be impressed with whatever was said about him. The second is an incident in the life of Rahab, who was a Gentile and a prostitute. Any Gentile Christian reading James’ letter would be especially challenged by her example.



A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses

Theme: Good works

I Introduction

1. James leaves us in no doubt that a living faith shows itself in a life of faith.
2. Like the good teacher he is, he does not leave us with a general principle, but gives us clear illustrations.
3. The conduct of Abraham and Rahab gives us a broad view of the life of faith.

II The life of faith is a life of devotion to God

The example of Abraham shows us a life of total commitment to God. In his offering of Isaac, Abraham was submitting his mind and heart to God.

1. HIS MIND – God’s command to offer Isaac was contrary to known reason, but Abraham obeyed God and trusted his wisdom, rather than his own. For us, the life of faith means submitting to God’s Word in every situation, whatever the cost.
2. HIS HEART – Abraham loved his son Isaac very deeply, and yet he was willing to sacrifice him and love God even more. For us, the life of faith means putting God first, even before those we love (Luke 14:26; Mark 12:28-30).

III The life of faith is a life of love to others

Rahab’s kindness shows us this in two ways:-

1. HER KINDNESS – she gave hospitality to two strangers from another country (Heb.13:2). This perfectly illustrates the kindness James writes about (2:14-17).
2. HER PROTECTION – she was concerned for the safety and welfare of the spies. We too, are called upon to show pity both for the physical and the spiritual condition of others.

IV Application Ephesians 2:10

For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

shown to be so. This is the same sense in which the writer to the Hebrews uses Abraham’s offering of Isaac (Heb. 11:17-19).

Verse 23

And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,”

The key to understanding James correctly is to note that Abraham was accounted righteous (justified by faith) at a much earlier time (Gen. 15) than when he offered Isaac (Gen. 22). In that earlier case Abraham trusted the bare word of God. He was acting in faith and not by doing some deed. Paul, in writing to the Romans (4:12), says that Abraham believed in the promise of God before he was circumcised, which took place in Genesis 17. Paul, when writing about justification by faith in his letters to the Galatians and Romans, and James in this passage, are both going back to the same incident of Genesis 15. So James is far from teaching that anyone is justified by works. By quoting this verse from Genesis 15, James is saying that Abraham’s faith was proved to be genuine by what he did after God declared him to be righteous. This is how Scripture was proved to be genuine in what it said about Abraham’s faith.

and he was called God’s friend.

This is taken from two scriptures (2 Chr. 20:7 and Is. 41:8) and seems to reflect the degree into which Abraham was able to enter into the mind of God and harmonise with it (Gen. 18:17; John 8:56). For God to refer to Abraham as his friend was a wonderful privilege and beyond human reasoning. It was an act of grace (undeserved favour). This has much the same sense as when Jesus called his disciples his friends (John 15:15) as he shared some very profound teaching with them.

Verse 24

You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

This verse has caused some believers a difficulty as they see a conflict between what Paul says about justification by faith alone and what James says here. (See Focus Point at the end of this study for a further discussion of Paul and James.) There is no contradiction when we consider this verse in the light of our interpretation of verses 20-23. We understand that when James here says “not by faith alone”, he means that kind of faith that does not bear the fruit of suitable deeds. He is still persisting in his challenge to us to examine our faith to see if it is fruitful. A good way of understanding both Paul and James is

to see how they use the word “justified”. This is where appreciating the context of their writings is so important. Paul uses the word “justified” as God’s declaration of how man is accepted on the basis of Christ’s sacrificial death. James uses the word “justified” to speak of man’s demonstration that his faith in Christ is genuine. At this point we notice that the kind of deeds in view here go far beyond the limited scope of love to our neighbours. The action of Abraham in offering his son Isaac was one of unquestioning obedience to God, and trust in the absolute power of God. Isaac was the son God gave Abraham by a miracle, and God had promised that a great nation would be born through him. Yet God commanded Abraham to sacrifice this very son and so tested Abraham’s love and trust in God almost beyond human endurance. He passed that test with unquestioning obedience! (Gen.22.) Also, Abraham believed (had faith) that God could raise the dead (Heb.11:17-19) and he acted on the basis of that faith. James teaches us that the evidence of saving faith is a life of love and obedience to God.

Verse 25

In the same way, was not even the prostitute Rahab considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?

James now introduces his second illustration, Rahab. The story of Rahab is found in Joshua 2 and 6:22-23. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews says that what she did was because of her faith (Heb. 11:31). When reading the Old Testament story, we might admire what Rahab did, but without the New Testament comment, we might hesitate to attribute her actions to faith. This is an example of the importance of interpreting the Old Testament in the light of the New. Since the New Testament tells us that Rahab had saving faith, we must accept that and interpret the story with that in mind. One reason for hesitation about attributing Rahab’s action to faith would be the deception of sending the men who chased the spies the wrong way. The question arises as to whether the Lord condones such actions. Two answers at least seem to be possible. First, since it was a war situation, Rahab’s action comes within the accepted practice of war which includes every possible attempt to deceive an enemy. Second, it is never reasonable to expect new converts immediately to understand or adopt every new standard of conduct. Sometimes the habits of the past take a long time to be recognised as wrong and to be discarded. Even if neither of these explanations is right, there is no reason here for us to practise deception in our dealings with others (1 Pet. 2:1).

Rahab’s deeds arising from her faith (expressed to the spies in Joshua 2:11) were acts of kindness to men in danger, and they were also an expression of her desire to give success to the kingdom of God.

Verse 26

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

James leaves us in no doubt how serious he feels this subject to be. This final thrust lacks nothing in clarity and severity. Having mentioned that faith without works is barren, or fruitless, he returns to the charge that it is dead (verse 17). Nothing could be plainer than this. Unless our faith arises from the work of the Holy Spirit within us, then it is of a different kind, it is not living faith, it will not issue in a life of love to God and to others; it is dead!



Summary

James was concerned to challenge the person who claims to be a Christian yet shows no evidence of this. This has been the main theme of the letter, brought out so clearly in chapter 2, verses 14-26 (Studies 7 and 8). In our previous study we saw James stressing that deeds without faith are unacceptable to God. Faith comes first and is confirmed by a life of love and practical help. James continues this teaching by using two examples of people from the Old Testament, Abraham and Rahab. We see from their lives the full scope of the kind of practical living that arises from a living faith. It is God-ward in seeking to please God by obedience and working for the advance of his kingdom. This practical living is also expressed in love, kindness and compassion to other people. James uses these two witnesses, a patriarch at one end of the social spectrum and a prostitute from the other end, to emphasise that this teaching applies to all, no matter what their background or upbringing.

What these verses mean

Verse 1

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers,

This might seem to contradict Paul who wrote, “If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task,” (1 Tim. 3:1). James would agree with Paul that teaching (“overseer” includes teaching) is to be highly esteemed. James would also approve of the qualifications Paul sets out for this noble task, which would surely deter anyone in danger of rushing too quickly into the work (1 Tim. 3:2-7). Earlier in that same letter to Timothy, Paul writes about those who want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about (1 Tim. 1:7). The early church had to face the problem of the exalted teacher’s position being one that men hankered after. It was a continuation of the puffed-up position of the rabbi in the Jewish church. The word that James uses, “presume”, suggests that he is not addressing those teachers who are qualified to teach, but those who are eager to speak in public and have failed to recognise that the basic qualification for teaching is learning. This problem has not gone away and is so rampant in the Christian church today. There are many who scheme and plot to gain positions for themselves in the church. Such ambition is a deadly sin, arousing envy, pride, deceit and hypocrisy. Leadership is not a sign of worthiness or superiority, but is a God-given appointment to serve by example.

because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

Privilege always carries with it greater responsibility. Every Christian will have to give an assessment of his life on the day of judgement (Rom. 14:12). James has already given some teaching on judgement in 2:12-13 (Study 6). Now he returns to it with particular reference to those who teach the Scriptures to others. In our study of 2:12 (pages 55-56) we observed that in judgement there will be different degrees of rewards and also losses. Again we remind ourselves that this is not referring to our salvation, which is secure in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, but to our accountability before God of the Christian life we have led. Jesus taught that of those who had been entrusted with much, much more will be asked (Luke 12:48). This is the point James is now making and is a warning to those who aspire to positions to satisfy their own egos. The teacher will be judged not only on the content of his teaching but on the conduct of his own life. His life should reflect the subject of his teaching, Scripture. Scripture sets high standards and consequently more will be demanded of the



Focus Point:

James and Paul

Having completed our work on verses 14-26, we are now ready to answer those who assert that James is teaching salvation by works in contrast to Paul’s teaching of salvation through faith. So strongly have some people held this view that they have doubted that this letter by James should even be in the New Testament. We have to take this seriously because such a great Reformer as Martin Luther would not accept the authority of James.

First of all, we must note that there is no adequate historical evidence for omitting James’ letter from our Bibles. It would seem that it has always been there. Secondly, since that is so, we must be guided by Paul’s words that “all Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16). This means that as God is the author of the whole Bible, there cannot be any contradictions. God cannot contradict himself. So if there seems to be a conflict, the fault is with our poor understanding and not with the Bible. Thirdly, as we have seen in our detailed studies, when we remember to whom James is writing, and what he is teaching, we find that James and Paul are in complete harmony. Fourthly, we might even say that James gives necessary balance to the total New Testament relationship between faith and works.

Those who see a conflict between James and Paul believe that while Paul teaches that we are saved by faith without works, James is saying that we are saved by works. The truth is that both writers agree that we are saved by faith. Paul is clear about this in all his letters (note especially Eph. 2:8-9), because that is his major theme. James does not say so much about this aspect because he has another aspect he wants to stress. But he says that we receive new birth through the word of truth (1:18). This implies salvation through faith, because it is through faith in the word that we receive life. But, more directly in 2:5, James says that it is through faith that those who love the Lord inherit the kingdom. We find the same in 2:14, where James assumes that we are saved through faith. But in harmony with the whole section, he is examining the kind of faith that saves.

Both Paul and James are also agreed that the kind of faith that saves is a faith that shows itself in a life of love to God and toward others. Paul

spends 5 chapters in his letter to the Romans setting out the doctrine of justification by faith in detail and then 11 chapters on the kind of life people who have been justified by faith should live. Paul does the same in his letter to the Ephesians where after 3 chapters of teaching about salvation, he has 3 more about the kind of life that we must follow. James says exactly the same, but in a slightly different way. He says if we claim to have faith, but do not live the life that should follow, then the faith we claim to have is not faith that saves.

It is clear then that when James says that “a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone” (2:24), we must understand this as a very strong statement that we deceive ourselves if we claim to believe, to trust in Jesus Christ, but our lives fail to demonstrate the reality of our faith.

This is very important because there are those who teach that so long as we say we are trusting in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, it does not matter what kind of life we live. Both Paul and James would condemn such teaching.



Note

Here are two marks of a good teacher –

1. *Repetition* – James says the same thing more than once, each time in a slightly different way.
2. *Illustration* – James does not stop at a general principle, but shows what he means by clear illustration.



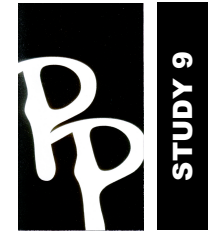
Over to you

If in your society people think that they can earn their place in heaven, how would you go about showing them that they are in error and in great danger?

Conversely, do you have people in your congregation who say they are Christians but do not show it in the way they live and relate to other people? If so, how will the letter written by James help you?

Write down in your own words how you would reconcile Romans 5:1 and James 2:24. Could you then explain it to a seven year old child?

TAMING THE TONGUE



James 3:1-12

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: Does the Bible teach the doctrine of sinless perfection?
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

James has left us in no doubt that what we do is an important indication of the reality, or otherwise, of the faith we profess. Now we see that what we say is a big part of what we do, and in these verses our speech is subjected to the most severe examination. Since, as we have seen, James is most probably our Lord's brother, we can think of him recalling the perfect example he knew so well (Ps.45:2; Luke 4:22). Like James, Peter also was very familiar with the one of whom he said, “No deceit was found in his mouth,” and “he did not retaliate” (1 Pet. 2:21-23). The words we are about to study also reflect the Lord's own teaching (Matt.12:33-37), “By your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.” If we have not realised how unruly our tongues can be, James will prove to us the need for them to be tamed!

the animal world (Gen.1:28) continues for all generations. This must never be used as a reason for cruel methods of control or exploitation for financial gain. We are to manage God's world with a view to its preservation in strength and beauty. Training animals is a skilled occupation and one that many people master. It is remarkable how many animals are tamed, from elephants and lions to dolphins and birds of prey. Man has been able to harness animals to help in the labours of life, with elephants in forestation work to donkeys in underground coalmines.

but no man can tame the tongue.

Despite all that we can do with the large and wild creatures of this world, few of us have complete control all the time over what we say. This is much the same as saying that we humans have learned to harness all the elements of creation, except ourselves. We fail in the area that is most important, because it can affect the very course of history; therefore it should be our priority. The really worrying thing about all that James says here is that he includes everybody ("but no man can ..."). He does not say some people have tongues that are liable to do harm; but that this is the character of the tongue in us all. Also we must remember that he is writing to Christians!

It is a restless evil,

If we are restless other people cannot be sure what we will do next. We will be liable to do something that is unexpected. James says that the tongue is like that. If it is not under strict control, you never know what evil it might do.

full of deadly poison.

Our tongues are capable of poisoning the fellowship of our church or the reputation of earnest Christians and many other evils. But we do have the Spirit's enabling to make sure that such things do not happen. "No man" can do it without the Spirit's aid.

Verse 9

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness.

Once again James is not content to rest his case on general principles, but he makes sure he is understood, by an example that cannot be misunderstood. Here we have someone in worship, singing God's praise, and the same person immediately follows this with unkind, pernicious words to a member of the congregation. This is, in itself, bad enough, but when we remember that the person who is addressed

teacher than of other believers. This is the reason why men should not presume to be teachers. See also Hebrews 13:17 for a further comment on this matter.

Verse 2

We all stumble in many ways.

James makes further comment to those who would rush, without thinking, to be teachers. He is warning those who want to be teachers simply because of their love of authority, or prominence, or who can speak well, but have no true understanding of God's truth. They will have a feeling of superiority and a critical attitude, which will be seen in their style of teaching. It will be more legalistic (the rules to follow, the things not to do) rather than about the grace of God. Such people should remember that they are far from perfect and have many faults, along with everyone else. A good teacher will always be painfully aware of imperfection. This questions the wisdom of pushing new converts into teaching before they are spiritually mature. (See 1 Timothy 3:6; 5:22.) These verses should not be used to support a false humility that refuses to acknowledge the gift from God to teach despite the discernment of other believers. This might be a symptom of a lack of faith and unwillingness to bear responsibility in the church. These things need to be prayerfully considered when teachers are being appointed.

If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.

It may be that James' original idea was to expand on the subject of teachers in the churches. Whether or not that is so, his reference to teachers leads him to a long section about the need for all Christians to be careful how they speak. These words sum up what James wants to say. In the rest of the verses of our study he gives illustrations and examples of what he says here. Whenever we might want to pass by the subject of the control of our tongues, James gives two reasons for us to take the matter seriously. Firstly, he says that if we never speak wrongly, it is a sign that we are spiritually mature and well balanced (perfect). This tells us that such control is by no means easy, and that it takes time for us to achieve anything like success. Secondly, such success has an effect on the whole of our conduct. At the same time as gaining control over our tongues, we will find that we are also getting mastery over all other areas of life with its trials and testings.

Verse 3

When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal.

We have the first of two illustrations to make the point very clear that the tongue is the most difficult part of the body to keep in check. It is the horse, a powerful, surging animal. Yet a small piece of metal placed in its mouth can bring such an animal under control.

Verse 4

Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.

The second example is taken from shipping. Although these vessels are so large and are 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. In James' day the ships were wholly dependent upon the wind as their power. The same point still applies to modern shipping, where ships such as the huge oil tankers, driven by large and powerful engines, are still steered by the pilot using the rudder.

The two illustrations James uses here both underline the need for skill.

- The jockey (horse rider) must learn to have a sensitive touch on the bridle and bit to save the horse from danger or from a wrong track.
- The pilot likewise needs much training to be able to steer the ship clear of the dangers of rocks and storms.

The way we handle the tongue requires great control, which does not come easily but demands discipline arising from a renewed spirit in Christ. Controlling the tongue will not come naturally to the person just because he is a Christian, as the sinful nature is still present.

Verse 5

Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts.

Here James is following the thought that the use of our tongues has a big effect, for good or ill, on the rest of our lives. James says that the tongue "makes great boasts", which means that it is capable of remarkable power and influence. We see this when an orator moves a country to courage, or a nation to racial hatred. The tongue may be

small, but it can have greater consequences than we realise. For the Christian life to be pleasing to God requires a conduct, including most importantly the control of our tongues, that can only be achieved by much prayer, thought, persistence and care.

Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.

Until this point James is simply reminding us of the importance of controlling the tongue, because, though it is small, it is capable of big influence, which might be either good or bad. But now he is warning his readers and us of the terrible harm that an uncontrolled tongue can do. Just as a small spark can destroy wide areas of woodland, so gossip, lies, impure, angry or unwise words can ruin our own lives and those of many people around us. Paul says much the same in Romans 3:13-18.

Verse 6

The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body.

The idea here seems to be that the evil world around us has its representative within us – the tongue. All the characteristics of the evil world find, in our tongues, an easy channel of expression. The force of James' teaching here is that we must not think of the tongue as neutral. Its potential for evil is so powerful that, left without control, it will automatically become an instrument for wrong.

It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire,

This means that words spoken without thought or with evil intent can affect our own feelings and attitudes to ourselves and to others. They can then affect for a lifetime the way other people think about us. The result of the wrong use of our tongue can be immediate, and it can stay with us for a very long time.

and is itself set on fire by hell.

This is very strong language, but it reminds us that there is an evil one, Satan, who desires our destruction, and that he is easily able to prompt us to say things that are false, unkind, lustful or impure. We are very foolish if we forget, ignore or even deny the influence Satan can have on our lives! (There is an example recorded in Matthew 16:21-23). Our tongue can become an instrument of Satan, unless we control its use very carefully.

Verses 7

All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man,

This is a confirmation that the instruction given to Adam to rule over

In 1 John 3:6 the Greek verbs in the present tense are best translated to indicate a continual activity. When John says, “No one who abides in him sins,” it means that no one who lives in Christ will keep on sinning. No one who keeps on sinning has either seen Christ or knows him. The Bible throughout teaches that it is impossible for us to lead lives completely free of sin. Jesus himself taught the disciples when praying to ask for bread each day and for our sins to be forgiven. Our growing in spiritual maturity (sanctification or holiness) will not be completed whilst we are on earth.

The danger to be avoided is to use this teaching for not trying to lead godly and holy lives. There are many commands in the New Testament that are clear on this point. Just because we cannot attain perfection on earth is not an excuse for not trying and instead lead a sinful life. Another danger is that some may lose hope of making any progress in the Christian life. This is where the teaching of the resurrection power of Christ in a believer’s life enables sin to be overcome. Sanctification will never be completed in this life but it enables Christians to grow in maturity. It is possible for Christians to be daily free from conscious or wilful acts of disobedience to God. This is not the same as being perfect.

The material used in preparing this Focus Point was taken from Wayne Grudem’s Bible Doctrine – Essential teachings of the Christian faith (Inter-Varsity Press).



Over to you

Consider your own position. Do you presume to be a teacher or were you appointed to be one by others recognising that God has given you the gift to teach? (Remember your accountability before God; you’ll have more to answer for than those in your congregation.)

Notice that James starts off this passage with teachers. The tongue is used as their main means of communicating with the listener. If you were to preach on this passage now, would your listeners call you a hypocrite?

Have you discovered that it is possible to speak of God’s hatred of sin and of the judgement to come in a gracious manner? (See Matthew 23:37-38 and 1 Timothy 4:12.)

bears the marks of God’s creation (Gen.1:26), that unruly tongue has cancelled out the value of his praise expressed to God by despising his creation.

Verse 10

Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

We continue with the inconsistency of the tongue. James will reinforce his point with two further illustrations taken from nature to make this clear. Before he does so he reminds us that this inconsistency is not acceptable in the Christian believer. How can a believer be in worship, singing praises, listening to God’s Word one moment and a few moments later be saying harsh things about fellow-Christians? What conversations take place immediately amongst the congregation as soon as the service closes?

Verse 11

Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?

It is impossible for such inconsistency to take place in the natural world. James shows us this by asking his readers two questions. Can fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? There are both natural water springs and salt water springs, but they are separate, never together as being one source for the two types of water.

Verse 12

My brothers, can a fig-tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs?

In the same way we are asked to answer the question, “Can a fig tree bear olives or a grapevine bear figs?” James is reflecting the teaching of Jesus (Matt. 7:16-20, 12:33-37, 15:18,19). The conclusion is simple; no one can doubt the answer.

Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

Nature is ordered and follows the basic laws. It is not inconsistent. A tree can only bear its own fruit. So too a salt spring can only produce salt water; fresh water cannot flow from it. This impossibility from the natural world is now applied to the spiritual realm to show how improper is such an inconsistency. Now we see the reason for the tongue being so prone to evil. The secret is that what we say comes from what we are in the depth of our being. The spring is the heart. We cannot escape the truth. If our tongues are not under control, this means that our heart is defective. If we say harmful and destructive things, then our heart must be corrupt, which means that Christ is not in control. James’ teaching compels us to examine our hearts to see if

they are dominated by love for the Lord Jesus and a desire to please him in all we say and do. If our thoughts are right, our words will also be right.



Summary

As a Jew, now converted, James is painfully aware of the tendency of his people in the past to rely on the possession of God's law and the observance of religious rituals to give them credit with God. But they did not match this knowledge and ritual with their conduct. They were being careless in their lifestyles. James is continually insisting that our way of life should be consistent with our profession of faith, and for him that way of life includes the way we speak. Furthermore, the way we speak is a most accurate indicator of our spiritual state, so much so, that if our tongues are not under control, then James would question whether we really do have new life in Christ.



A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses

Theme: Gracious speech

Introduction

James leaves us in no doubt about two things –

- i. that our tongues can be used for good or ill.
- ii. that our manner of speech is a good indication of our spiritual state.

1. We do well to examine our manner of speaking in the light of Jesus' example

A. It is said of Jesus that the people marvelled at his gracious words (Luke 4:22).

- i. This was true not only on that occasion but at all times.
- ii. It means that his words were always for the good of others.
- iii. It also means that his way of speaking was attractive so that people wanted to listen to him.

B. It is said that Jesus spoke without deceit (1 Pet. 2:22).

- i. This means that he always spoke the truth.

- ii. It also means that he never tried to deceive people.

- iii. Such speech is without exaggeration, flattery or saying one thing whilst meaning another.

2. We do well to confess our sins in the use of our tongues

Isaiah was a man of God and yet, when he faced the holiness of God, he was convicted of "unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5-7).

- i. Sins of speech are as offensive to God as murder (Matt. 5:21-22) and merit God's judgement.
- ii. If we confess our sins, God will forgive us (1 John 1:8-9).

Application

Our constant prayer needs to be Psalm 141:3.



Focus Point:

Does the Bible teach the doctrine of sinless perfection?

With the phrase in verse 2, "If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man ..," there may be a suggestion that James is saying that we ought to achieve perfection. There have always been some in the church who have taken various texts such as Matthew 5:48, 2 Corinthians 7:1 and 1 John 3:6 to argue that man should be able to obey God's commands perfectly. Their reasoning is that since God gives these commandments then he must give us the ability to obey them perfectly. Being perfect in obedience is known as the doctrine of sinless perfection. Phrases such as *perfectionism* or *perfect holiness* mean the same thing. Is that what the Bible teaches?

In our own verse 2 James begins with the phrase, "We **all** stumble in many ways." James doesn't leave anyone out - all human beings stumble. A closer examination of the texts in Matthew and 2 Corinthians show us that the Bible does not teach that God gives commands and then the ability to obey them perfectly. He commands us to obey and then holds us accountable for not obeying. The standard which we are set is perfect because it shows that God is morally pure. The fact that we cannot attain that standard does not mean that the standard will be lowered for us. It does mean that we need God's grace and forgiveness to overcome all remaining sin. These various texts point us to the goal that God desires us to reach and aspire to.

But the wisdom that comes from heaven

This means wisdom from God (1:5). The source of true, spiritual wisdom is God and is so different from the earthly (false) wisdom described in the previous verses. When Jesus Christ came down from heaven (John 3:31-33), he brought God's wisdom down to earth. This would have left an impression upon James as he witnessed the life of Jesus at home with the family. This kind of wisdom that James is going to describe arises only in the lives of those who are "born from above". Such a life of wisdom is another essential confirmation of the genuineness of a profession of faith.

is first of all pure;

Impurity always leads to loss and misery. This is especially so in the case of sexual uncleanness, but it is the same with such impurity as dishonesty and drunkenness. What a good thing it is that the new birth enables us to be wise! Purity provides the foundation for what follows.

then peace-loving,

We are not likely to work for unity and harmony within the church if we enjoy chaos, discord or disputes. If we love peace we will work for it. Jesus indicated that peace-making was one of the outstanding signs that we are children of God (Matt.5:9), that is, those who are born again.

considerate,

This consideration is a tool in the hands of a peace-maker. It means going as far as we can in seeing other people's points of view and doing things the way they would prefer. It is not the same as giving in to every whim or opinion of others, but is a willingness to please them as far as we can. Far from being weak, this requires considerable strength of mind.

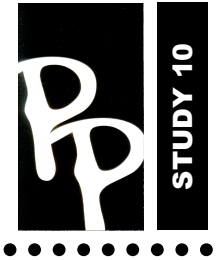
submissive,

Closely linked to being "considerate", being submissive is showing a willingness to listen to what others want to say to us and for our minds to be changed if what they say is reasonable. Unity in church life is hardly possible if no one is willing to admit (however reluctantly) to the possibility of being wrong.

full of mercy

This begins by remembering our own weaknesses and limitations, so that we realise that other people are just as human as we are. If we do this, we will be less inclined to criticise others, and more ready to forgive their faults and mistakes. A big cause of discord in church life (and family life) is to have too high an expectation of others. We look for a perfection in them that we fall short of in ourselves. God

HEAVENLY WISDOM



James 3:13-18

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: Worldliness
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

As an introduction to these verses it is instructive to notice the leadership of James as seen in Acts 15:12-21; 21:17-25. A study of both these passages will reveal James as a man of authority, and yet of considerable tact and skill in seeking to avoid division. We see him exhibiting the very qualities he is calling for here. His theme is the need of spiritual wisdom, "the wisdom that comes from heaven", on the part of Christian teachers and leaders, but what he says applies also to all Christian believers. James continues with the theme of 2:14-26, which are the key verses to the whole letter. This is that genuine faith is demonstrated by the person's life. Now the test of real faith is to be measured against the possession of wisdom.

What these verses mean

Verse 13

Who is wise and understanding among you?

This could be a new subject without a necessary connection with the previous verses. But since James writes as one thought gives rise to another, we need to see these verses as a development of what he says

in verse 1 about people taking care before they become teachers. That verse seems to deter anyone from taking on the task of teaching or leadership. But here James gives some encouragement to those with suitable gifts, and then gives guidance as to how those gifts are to be used. The two gifts are wisdom and understanding. A teacher in the church needs to know the facts of the gospel and have a good grasp of the contents of the Bible, but this does not amount to wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to use knowledge helpfully and in a way that pleases God. Many people have an abundance of knowledge but their lives are confused. Wisdom in Christian teachers is the ability to apply the Scriptures to their own lives and those of their people. The word James uses for understanding has to do with skill, in this case the ability to handle the Scriptures and to make clear its teaching.

Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

This illustrates how wisdom shows itself. First it will be by a good life, which means one that is attractive, without corruption and helpful. Barnabas was a teacher in the church at Antioch, and he is called “a good man” (Acts 11:24). The requirement of “deeds done in humility” would most probably have been a shock for many of James’ readers. The culture into which they had been born, and that which surrounded them was self-assertive, where strong masculinity was looked upon as normal standard. The whole idea of meekness was despised. Christian teachers, following their Master (Matt.11:29), were to be different; they must learn the very difficult art of exercising authority in a humble manner. Teaching and the way of life of the teacher must not be separated. What the teacher is affects the way he teaches and the way people receive what he says.

Verse 14

But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, Once again James leaves us in no doubt about what he is saying. The two attitudes described here are the very opposite to the goodness and humility of the previous verse. “Bitter envy” translates an idea of inner heat. It is a readiness to fight for one’s rights, or position. It is self-interest on fire! “Selfish ambition” is a determination to promote one’s self and one’s own ideas even at the cost of causing resentment and division in the church.

do not boast about it or deny the truth.

These words are a warning that we should examine ourselves. If what has just been said is true of us, we should admit it, and withdraw from the intention of becoming a teacher. We should not boast about these

defects as though they were assets, and we should understand that when such people become teachers, they are, in themselves, a denial of the truth they proclaim. All who preach and teach need to be known by their hearers and students as practising what they preach and teach. There has to be a searching of heart to root out all envy and selfish ambition. Such seeking and confession will stem from a close relationship with God, and bring the preacher to the very truths of God.

Verse 15

Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven

We now read of the source of this “false wisdom”. What a contrast with 1:5 where James reminds us that the source of true wisdom is God himself (Rom. 11:33-36). This wisdom was seen in Jesus Christ (Luke 2:52; Col. 2:3), and the character of “false wisdom” described in verse 14 is the opposite of what we see in him.

but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.

Self-centredness and self-promotion, far from reflecting wisdom from heaven, have their origin in the godless culture of the world. Paul warns about this in Romans 12:2. Such attitudes cannot arise from an application of Scripture to our thinking and are therefore “unspiritual”. Furthermore, a mind that is not under the mastery of Scripture is always open to the influence of Satan, and in this context Satan is very keen to create ill-feeling, division and discord in the church.

Verse 16

For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

The opposite to self-centredness is Christ-centredness. If we do not have the ambition to please him in everything, Satan will soon drive us to wanting other people to please us (envy), and give way to us. The result will be restlessness and division in the church and the Corinthian problem of fragmentation (1 Co.1:10-12)¹ will soon arise. The force of the words “evil practice” seems to be worthlessness. A divided church does no good; it defiles the space it occupies!

Verse 17

¹ The church at Corinth was divided. Rather than being an example of unity to the surrounding discordant society, the Corinthian church resembled it. The church should have been different, but instead was contaminated with the dirt of the world. The problem stemmed from the Christians losing sight of the grace they had in Christ and becoming obsessed with the mistrust and jealousies they had for each other. Paul in writing his letter, which we have recorded in the Bible as 1 Corinthians, has to deal with this problem. This takes up the opening chapters of that letter.

the Christian believer must attend to. A person may abstain from all the actions we have mentioned above and yet still be consumed by worldly desires and passions.

James views worldliness mainly as the spirit of a life and not its outward form. He understands worldliness to be when the inner desires and motives are in harmony with those of the world. The world does not know or does not want to know God. The things of this world are the riches that fade away, seeking the praise of men, preferring the pleasures of fleshly lust. It is when a Christian believer goes after these things in his heart and would rather not be distracted or interfered with by the God of the Bible that we can describe such a person as having fallen into worldliness.

Worldliness is not an alternative lifestyle that is all right with God. It is a rejection of God's ways, infringing his will. It affects believers in every society of every age. Whether it is a rich society or a poor one struggling in harsh conditions, the world still has its ways of doing things which are contrary to God's will. Corruption, dishonesty, greed are to be found in all walks of worldly life and it is not difficult for the unwary Christian to be sucked into such a way of thinking and living.

Source used: Gordon J. Keddie, *The Practical Christian* (Evangelical Press)



Over to you

Why do you think people should listen to our preaching?

- Because we preach the truth?
- Because we make them laugh?
- Because we shout?
- Because we tell interesting stories?
- Because they love us?
- Because we live what we preach?
- Because we use modern language?
- Because we explain the Bible?
- Because they know we love them?

remembers that we are dust (Ps. 103:14), for which we are thankful. We should have the same attitude toward others that God has toward us.

and good fruit,

The meaning here is not absolutely clear, but James is well aware of Jesus' teaching, so we must assume that by "fruit", he means the same as Jesus in his teaching in John 15:1-17. The evidence of wisdom from heaven will be lives that remind others of the character of Jesus. Paul details what that means in his description of the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22-23). (See Study 23, Book 3 of Galatians Preachers' Study Papers for a detailed analysis of these verses.)

impartial

Leaders have to make judgements and they are always in danger of being influenced by their own prejudices or ambitions, and coming to unfair conclusions. We will gain the confidence of the people if they can be sure that we will deal with differences within the church without bias or favouritism.

and sincere.

The word here means being without hypocrisy or not trying to be two different people like an actor who is one thing at home and another on the stage. What we are in church and what we are in the family or at work can be two very different things. This is appropriate as the last word in this description of a life controlled by heavenly wisdom and in the context of James' main theme. The life we live may not agree with the faith we profess. If this is so, we are trying to be two different people. So James agrees with Paul's exhortation, "Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Phil.1:27).

Verse 18

Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

Spiritual progress in the life of the church will depend very much on the quality of the fellowship, and it may well be that this is close to what James is saying here. Many other things are involved such as sound teaching and earnest prayer, but even when these exist in a large measure, if there is not a peacefulness in the church, spiritual progress is unlikely. With this in mind we can see the peacemakers in this verse as those described in verse 17. Such people will be like farmers who sow the seed that will produce the crop they desire. Here the seed is peace, and the harvest is righteousness. James is probably using the word "righteousness" in the sense of salvation, similar to its use in Isaiah 45:22-25. When a church is at peace in its life before God, then it may look for people to be saved.



Summary

James is still working out his major theme of testing the genuineness of our profession of faith by the quality of what we say and do. Here he does this by contrasting two kinds of wisdom based on two different sources. If a professing Christian's life is one of self-centredness creating discord in the church, then that life is based on the world's wisdom and we have to question if it is possible for such a person to be born again. James' description of a life based on God's wisdom could be a mirror of the life of Jesus Christ on earth. If we are born again, that will be our aim and we will grieve at our falling short of it.



A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses

Theme: Ambition – can be wrongly or rightly directed

Introduction

Ambition is part of what it means to be human.

- i. Without ambition, life has little meaning.
- ii. We need an aim to which we give our minds and energies.
- iii. Wrong ambition can ruin us – right ambition is a mark of a Christian.

I. Ambition can be wrongly directed

In Scripture it is called selfish (Gal. 5:20; Phil. 1:17; 2:3; James 3:14,16). It belongs to earthly wisdom – a life without Christ.

1. There are ambitions that are obviously wrong – to become rich or famous; to achieve power or position out of pride.
2. There are ambitions that seem right – to live for our family, our work, to live as well as we can in order to earn favour with God and his salvation.

These end in failure or frustration and die with us.

II. Ambition can be rightly directed

1. This comes as a result of being saved, not in order to be saved.
2. Because we are saved we want to please God out of love and thankfulness (2 Cor.5:14-15).

3. We do all we can and spend ourselves to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom.15:20; 1 Thess.4:11-12).
4. We work hard for the benefit of God's people (2 Cor.12:15).
5. We strive to be like Jesus Christ (Phil.2:3-11).
6. We prepare diligently for entry into our Lord's presence (Phil.3:12-14).

N.B. This ambition is the mark of a true believer.



Focus Point: Worldliness

James' main concern in his letter was to make Christian believers see that their normal way of life was to be different from that of the non-Christian and that this lifestyle had to match the faith they professed. In this study we have considered the need for heavenly wisdom and not the earthly one instigated by the devil. As we continue our studies into chapter 4 we will deal with the problem of Christians fighting and quarrelling amongst themselves. Christian believers have the capacity to sin in the most awful ways and not just by accident. As we address these issues we will see that part of the problem lies in the way the believer looks upon the world and the influence it has upon him. The believer is now not of this world but still in it. In 4:4 James directs his comments at Christian believers whose thinking and lifestyles reflected much of the world and not their faith in Christ. James describes this as friendship with the world, which must be seen as hatred towards God.

The world we are here thinking about is that world which is opposed to God and his revealed will set out in the Bible. The word "worldliness" is used to describe the attitude and pattern of life which arises from open rebellion against God. The difficulty we have is that worldliness can be so easily narrowed down to a list of outward actions. In some Christian communities things like smoking, drinking, styles of dress, dancing etc. are used to categorise people between godliness and worldliness. Whilst such actions may provide some clues, especially if they are excessive, we have to look much deeper to start distinguishing traits of worldliness in a believer. We must not forget that James has been talking about all different kinds of sins that

minds renewed. Friendship with the world would be turning one's back upon God and a denial of his grace and goodness. This is seen by James as preferring the world to God.

Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

The really shocking possibility here is that we might not just drift into worldly ways, but that we might do so by deliberate choice. James probes his readers very deeply and leaves them with no possibility of misunderstanding what he means, or the serious consequences of the direction of their lives.

Verse 5

Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely?

This is a difficult verse for two reasons. The first reason is that there is no verse in the rest of the Bible that is anything like the words we have here. The best conclusion we can reach is that what James is about to say is something that can be deduced from other Scriptures. The second difficulty is uncertainty about the translation of the words, "the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely". If this is the right translation, it reflects God's creation of men when he "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Gen.2:7) As a result of man's fall into sin, his inner being became prone to what James has described in verses 1-4 (Mark 7:20-23).

Another possible translation, found in the margin of the New International Version, is this: "The Spirit he caused to live in us longs jealously." In this case the meaning would be that just as jealousy is aroused in a husband whose wife is unfaithful to him, so is God deeply offended and grieved when his people love the world more than they love him. The work of the Spirit in us is to arouse our appreciation of God's feelings in order to draw our hearts back to the Lord. This harmonises with what follows –

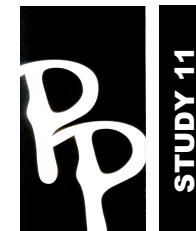
Verse 6

But he gives us more grace.

God will not allow his people to continue in unfaithfulness, but inclines our hearts back to himself. This is part of the Spirit's work of grace within us. That work of grace goes on to strengthen our resolve and ability to be true to him.

SINFUL CONFLICTS

AND GOD'S VIEW



James 4:1-6

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point 1: Grace
- 📁 Focus Point 2: The jealousy of God
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

We must never forget that, as Christians, we are all engaged in a spiritual warfare. We are called upon to fight against every form of evil in ourselves and in the world around us. Unfortunately, we all too often find ourselves fighting against our fellow-Christians; this is very grievous to the Lord and it is this that James condemns in these verses. In 3:16 he has said that when we have envy and selfish ambitions, this causes disruption in the church. It seems that James was so troubled about the problems that this kind of thing was causing among God's people that here in 4:1-6 he returns to it and hits it very hard indeed.

What these verses mean

Verse 1

What causes fights and quarrels among you?

This does not mean that every church at that time had this kind of problem, but it was sufficiently widespread for James to deal with it

openly in this way. Sadly, we have to admit that, all too often, churches have been ruined by inner conflict (1 Co. 3:3).

Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

It is very important that we stand for what is right and for the truth, but we can easily deceive ourselves. When we think we are fighting for sound doctrine, we are so often contending for our own ideas and our own position in the church. So, James says, the conflicts arise from within ourselves, driven by our own desires and what gives us pleasure or satisfaction. The word translated “desires” could be rendered “pleasures”, and is most often used in a bad sense, as for example in Luke 8:14.

Verse 2

You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want.

In this context “kill” is probably meant in the sense of anger giving rise to hatred. To hate and to covet are terrible sins with dreadful consequences. Jesus taught in his Sermon on the Mount that murder is not just the physical act of killing, but includes anger and character assassination (Matt. 6:21-22). However, James will not have excluded the taking of a life from what he was writing. The desires that arise from a sinful nature can, if not controlled, lead to murder being committed. What started as an evening walk on the palace roof for King David finally ended in the murder of Uriah. (See 2 Samuel 11.)

You quarrel and fight. You do not have,

This is true to life. So often we scheme and struggle to get what we want. We show little or no concern for the hurt we cause other people in the process. Very often it is all in vain and we fail to gain our point or whatever we fought for. But even when we succeed, we find that the result does not satisfy or give the pleasure we had expected. And all this at the price of discord and bitterness generally.

because you do not ask God.

The right way is to discover God's will. We don't do this because we think we know best and we hate the idea that we will be proved wrong. Prayer is the way to discover God's will in a given matter and to submit ourselves to him. We may pray, but miss out the very things we should be asking God for because we are not being honest with ourselves.

Verse 3

When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

This is helpful light on what we sometimes think of as unanswered prayer. Here, it is not that God has not heard, nor is it that he has not answered. His answer is something like this, “Before we go any further, I want you to examine yourself and ask yourself if your request is right, or if it is something of which I would approve! Also I want you to ask yourself if your reason for your request is a selfish one or will it benefit other people as well as yourself? Or are you just wanting a comfortable life?” Too often prayer can be used to justify our conduct or even to enlist God to our side.

Verse 4

You adulterous people,

Having examined the root cause of strife and unrest James now turns his attention to look at people whose lives are characterised by self-centred sins. He is writing his letter to Christians, and now, in particular, addresses those who may have slidden backwards in their faith. James is describing the typical actions of the unfaithful conduct of unconverted people. This is unacceptable behaviour for Christians in their relationship with God. The language James uses is very strong, but it reflects the way the Old Testament prophets spoke to the people of their day. Hosea was instructed to take an unfaithful woman, Gomer, as his wife. The prophet in his deep distress was able to understand God's feelings and addressed the people from the heart. Other Old Testament prophets spoke on the subject (Jer.3:6-7) as did the Lord Jesus (Matt. 12:39). Isaiah said, “Your Maker is your husband” (Isaiah 54:5) and in the New Testament Jesus is seen as the bridegroom (Matt. 25:1-13; Rev. 21:1-2). This is why people who love other gods or worldly pleasure instead of the Lord are regarded as adulterers.

don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God?

There were times when people in Israel longed to go back to Egypt (Num. 11:4-6; 1 Co. 10). They forgot the terrible slavery and oppression of those days. In the same way God's people down the ages have been foolish enough to revert to love for the pleasures of the world and its people. James makes his readers face up to what this really means, just as Jesus said (Matt.6:24). Christians are people God has called out of the world to serve him, their hearts having been transformed and



Over to you

Since discord in the church arises from members having a defective walk with God, do you think there are times when we should give more attention in our ministry to the need for a right relationship with God, instead of trying to solve the problems themselves?

What do your people pray about? Are there more selfish motives than matters concerning the glory of God and his kingdom? How will you address this?

On what basis do people think they are Christians? Did they really experience God's grace through a humbling experience of their unworthiness and sinful life? Or did they just think it would be a good idea to become a Christian because it served a selfish motive? (The answer you give will dictate how you will deal with a discordant situation in your church.)

That is why Scripture says:

James quotes from Proverbs 3:34 to show his readers how they can know the amazing grace of God.

“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

If we persist in the kind of conduct described in verses 1-4, it is an exhibition of pride. Of all sin pride is the one that most affronts God. Other sins are against his laws, but pride challenges the whole being of God and his sovereignty. God therefore resists the proud by refusing to speak to them and by removing their status. If we refuse to humble ourselves, the Lord will find ways of doing it for us. Those who humbly repent and change their ways will enjoy the Lord's pardon, and his enabling to pursue godliness. Jesus taught that unless a person changes and becomes like a little child, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Humility is the abandonment of all goodness in oneself and the throwing oneself on the mercy of God as a spiritually bankrupt person. It is only in this state that a person experiences God's grace in salvation and in his walking as a Christian.



Summary

Underlying these verses is the principle that our relationship with others arises from our relationship with God. If we are out of harmony with our fellow church members, it may be because we are out of harmony with the Lord.

The root cause arises from our uncontrolled selfish desires. Such desires can end in killing, sometimes physically but mostly attacking another person's reputation. We find ourselves in this position because we have not prayed about what we really need; and because we have not asked according to his will, God has not given. God looks upon such a person as being backslidden, which is compared to an unfaithful partner in a marriage relationship. Such a person is preferring the ways of this world rather than the kingdom of God. God's Spirit, who indwells the believer is aroused and longs jealously for the person to humble himself again, otherwise God will withhold his grace until the pride of the person is dealt with. This is a development of the foundational position, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps.111:10). Such fear is a blend of awe and love, and when we have this, we will be wise in our dealings with others.



A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses

Theme: Some lessons about prayer

These verses contain warning about the wrong use of prayer. We can use them to extract some basic lessons on the subject of prayer.

I The neglect of prayer

1. We can neglect prayer without realising it.
2. We should have regular times for prayer each day.
3. Even if we do this, it can become a matter of routine, and we may go through the form of prayer without the reality. This is the same as neglect.

II The consequences of neglect

1. We lose our sense of the love of God, our dependence on him and responsibility to him.
2. This in turn affects our attitude to others and we fail in our fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

NOTE Divisive conduct arises from a defective relationship with God.

III There is wrong use of prayer

1. We can use prayer to persuade ourselves that God approves of what we are doing.
2. We can use prayer as a means of pleasing ourselves and trying to get our own way.

IV Prayer should be a channel of God's grace

Prayer should be –

1. A means of humbling ourselves before God, and submitting ourselves to his way.
2. A means of humbling ourselves before our fellow-believers with a view to harmony and peace.



Focus Point 1: Grace

The word “grace” is very rich in meaning. It is most precious to believers when it is applied to salvation, especially in Paul’s letters (Rom. 3:24; 2 Tim. 1:8-10). In this case it means that God has loved us and given his Son Jesus Christ for us, despite the fact that, not only did we not by any means deserve it, but that we deserved judgement not mercy.

Grace means that our salvation began entirely in the wisdom and love of God, and that it continues to be dependent on him until we reach the glory. We can rightly expand our definition of grace as the love, wisdom and power of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit exerted for the beginning, the continuing and the completion of the salvation of those deserving only his wrath.

The same word is used in other ways. For example, it refers to our position as people acceptable to God (Rom. 5:2); to the enabling God gives us to live lives that please him (2 Co. 12:9; 2 Tim. 2:1); and to the quality of what we say and do as believers (Col. 4:6; 2 Co. 8:7).

See also the Focus Point in Galatians Book 1, Study 2 (page 18) for further notes on the description of Grace



Focus Point 2: The jealousy of God

Jealousy is applied to God in Scripture (Ex. 34:14; Josh. 24:19), but we must be careful how we understand this. Whenever we apply human emotions to God, such as anger, love, hatred or jealousy, we must be sure to rid them of the sinful elements that are always present when they apply to us. For instance, jealousy in us means that we lack something others possess, or that something has happened to wound our pride. When we read that God is jealous, it describes the intensity of his love for his people and his desire for their commitment to him (Zech. 8:2), and his anger when he is dishonoured (Deut. 6:15).

Paul harmonised with the Lord in his feelings for the Corinthian church (2 Co. 11:2).

word “double-minded”). Such a Christian is constantly torn in his affections between God and the world. Someone has described this as being two-faced with God. This has got to be rooted out, the heart cleansed and consecrated.

Verse 9

Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.

James intends the process of cleansing to be serious and thorough, and it is then that the feelings of grief described here will come to the surface. There can be no possible progress in the Christian life if we know little or nothing of this grief, or maintain a flippant, carefree attitude. David, the Psalmist, said, “A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Ps. 51:17). This contrasts with a modern view in some Christian circles where joy, peace and happiness are emphasised, where singing is seen to be the main part of worship in its length and importance. James does not intend that a mournful spirit is to be the only thing that is true of us. He wrote of joy in the midst of suffering (1,2), and Paul immediately followed the words about his wretchedness with “Who will rescue me...? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 7:24-25; see also Matt. 5:4).

Verse 10

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

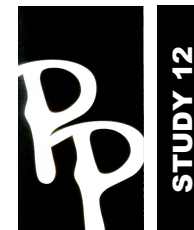
The kind of conduct James is condemning (3:13-16; 4:1-4) is full of self-esteem and self-promotion, so he calls for humility. An evidence of this is glad submission to God and his will for us. Another evidence is waiting his time and place for any praise or promotion he may see to be fit for us. We must wait for him to lift us up, as Peter says “in due time” (1 Pet. 5:6). The perfect example of this is Jesus Christ, who “humbled himself” (Phil. 2:8). Paul continues, “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place” (Phil. 2:9). The way up must first be downward!

Verse 11

Brothers, do not slander one another.

To slander someone means to talk against that person in an unfriendly way, with the intention of putting that person down. This can be done in many ways. Usually we do not defame fellow-Christians in loud, public announcements, but we do so in the course of gossip and behind the backs of those we talk about. We can also do so indirectly by half-truths, exaggeration or sly hints. (See Proverbs 6:12-14.) We either do this because of envy or hatred, or because we think under-

HUMBLE YOURSELVES



James 4:7-12

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: Things that are opposite that Christians hold together
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

As we have seen, James’ teaching has led us to realise that unspiritual conduct within the church arises from the poor relationship with God of those involved, so we are not surprised that he now turns to that theme. The poor conduct James has been describing is, among other things, an evidence of pride, for which the best cure is to realise what we are in God’s sight.

What these verses mean

Verse 7

Submit yourselves, then, to God.

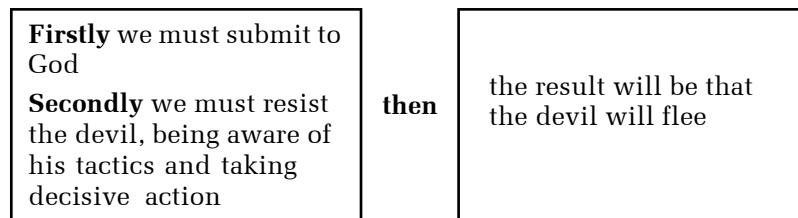
It follows from verse 6 that if we are serious about the Christian life and desire God’s blessing, then we will seek to be humble. An important sign of humility is a life of submission to God. But a warning is necessary. It is possible to be submissive to God’s way for us with a reluctant spirit and at the same time be persuaded that his way is wrong and our way would be better. The attitude James

requires is certainly based on confidence that God's way is right and therefore best, and based on a cheerful readiness to obey him. In practice submission to God means submitting to his doctrines, disciplines and demands. Many find the teaching of the Bible hard and try to reason with their corrupted, limited minds. See John 6:60-66 for an example where many found the teaching of Jesus hard. God uses the hard things of life, such as pain and sorrow, as disciplines to bring about his own glory. Many think that God should just provide pleasure. They ignore the teaching of the Bible on this subject (Deut. 8:5; Job 5:17; Heb. 12:5,6). Submitting to God is a recognition of his right to deal with us as he wishes and of his rightness to do so. God knows what his will is and demands submission from us so that we conform to that will. When God reveals these things through his Word, by his Spirit, through the fellowship and counsel of other Christians, we are to submit to these demands.

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

The word "resist" is a military term, which means to "take your stand against". It requires action to take up a defensive formation. Part of this action is the submission to God, resisting the devil's arguments, knowing his tactics and putting on the armour of God. From the time when Satan tempted Eve in the garden of Eden (Gen.3:1-12; John 8:44), his great aim has been to prevent people from submitting to God's will for them. When we know that, the moment we realise we are being drawn away from obedience to God, we will recognise what is happening to us and the source of the temptation, and in the Lord's strength we will resist it. This is the use of the "shield of faith" which Paul explains in Ephesians 6:16. Satan does not like being exposed; he hates the light. The great purpose of the devil's tempting of our Lord in the desert (Matt. 4:1-11) was to divert Jesus from submission to the Father's will. Jesus resisted him and the devil left him. (See also 1 Peter 5:8-9).

James is saying that the devil will flee from the ordinary Christian if the particular requirements of this whole verse are met.



Verse 8

Come near to God and he will come near to you.

Some people see the Christian life only in terms of the evils that they avoid and the temptations they overcome. This is morality, which is good so far as it goes, but it is not necessarily Christian. The Christian life is, first of all, a life lived in fellowship with God. Jesus said, "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3). In salvation, it is God who first comes to us, but in the Christian life, it is our responsibility, through Jesus Christ the Mediator, to seek the Lord, encouraged by the promise of his ready response. Coming near to God is the work of our whole Christian life. We do this continually because we are involved in a lifelong battle against the world, the flesh and the devil. As the Christian continually comes near to God, so God continually comes near to the Christian. The coming together in communion of the Christian with God will be in the spirit of what James is about to expand upon further, namely the continual cleansing from sin and genuine concern to be right with God.

Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts,

Here are echoes of Psalms 15 and 24:3-6. James' Jewish readers would also be familiar with the requirement that the Old Testament priests had to wash themselves before offering their sacrifices (Ex. 30:20 – 21). This was teaching them and us that cleansing is necessary before we can enter God's presence. In the New Testament this is the privilege of all believers; we are all priests now (1 Pet. 2:9). James addresses Christians as "sinners" because, although our sins are forgiven and we are no longer under God's judgement, we still have a residue of sin within us. So much so that Paul the apostle cried out, "What a wretched man I am!" (Rom. 7:24). The cleansing called for has to be thorough: hands and hearts, outward and inward. We are not to leave any sin unconfessed (inward). Our confession is through prayer (outward – for use of hands when dealing with prayer see 1 Tim. 2:8).

you double-minded.

James also calls Christians "double-minded". It would seem that there were professing believers in the churches who were only half-hearted in their commitment to the Lord. Often Christian believers struggle because their problem lies in the unspiritual attitude in the depths of their heart. Outwardly they may deal with specific sins, but inwardly they have two souls (that is the meaning of the

to trust the Lord at all times and in everything, and at the same time, we are to strive to please God as though this depended on our own efforts. Paul puts the two together in Philippians 2:12-13 and James does so in James 2:18. We can experience both joy and sorrow, and both grief for sin and assurance of salvation, at one and the same time. When we approach God in prayer, we are to be reverent and relaxed. As with doctrine, maturity is in holding both sides in each case with equal diligence; otherwise we will go astray.



Over to you

In view of Matthew 23:8-12, do you think we rely too much on titles and position and not enough on the quality of our lives to make an impact on our community?

How do you help your people to submit to and humble themselves before God? Is it something you can tell them to do and they will do it obediently? The way you answer this may well be an indication of the way you preach and teach.

After studying this passage, how would you deal with gossip in your church?

mining the reputation of someone else promotes our own position in other people's eyes. James reminds them again that they are brothers; how can those who belong to the same spiritual family, having been saved through the same precious blood, speak so ill of one another?

Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him, speaks against the law and judges it.

Notice the use of "brother" for the second time in this verse. James is setting before his readers the fact that they are in a spiritual partnership and therefore should always aim for harmony. If we slander or defame others, we are not only causing conflict and friction, but we are putting ourselves in the place of the law. This means that we are despising the law which, for the health of society, should always be honoured. Not only is the slanderer breaking the law (Ex. 20:16); he is putting himself in the position of saying what the law should say – he has therefore also become the law-giver.

When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.

The law itself condemns sitting in judgement on others. It requires us to love our neighbour as we love ourselves (Lev. 19:18; Rom. 13:9), so if we accuse someone else of not obeying God, we are doing the same thing ourselves. Not obeying a law ourselves means that we think it is a mistaken law, or that it does not apply to us. Paul was aware of this kind of thing in Romans 2:1.

Verse 12

There is only one Lawgiver and Judge,

The word "one" is important for modern societies, where the tendency is increasingly for each person to determine what is right or wrong for him or herself. Also national governments regard it as their right to set their own standards. We need to be reminded that God alone, as our Creator, has the authority to determine right and wrong, and to judge all people on that basis. God is the point of reference for all things from which we measure everything in life.

the one who is able to save and destroy.

People who persist in slander raise the question of whether they are born again Christians. Because of that it is appropriate to remind them that God is not only the Saviour, he is also the Judge. As always, James compels his members to examine themselves to see if they are true believers. If all judgement is in the hands of God, then who is man to

go around choosing which parts of God's laws he will obey? Such arrogance God will judge.

But you – who are you to judge your neighbour?

Not only is James showing man's foolishness in questioning God's laws, but he now goes on to point out man's ability to judge his neighbour. If we are Christian believers then we are sinners saved by grace. Since we are totally dependent on Jesus Christ for our salvation; since we are beset by failure and many shortcomings; who are we to criticise others, much less to condemn them? Everything about us points to our need to humble ourselves!



Summary

In the opening verses of chapter 4 James addressed the effect of uncontrolled desires amongst believers. They disturb the relationship between believers and between that person and God. Having exposed the problem, James, in the verses of this study, writes about how to deal with it. The key is humility, which is the opposite to pride. We have seen that humility is very desirable especially within Christian fellowship. The evidence for humility in these verses is found in glad submission to the Lord. When we submit willingly to God, we will find that the devil can be resisted and he will flee. Humility also involves an admission of our need of cleansing in both our conduct and our inner being; a grieving over our failures and shortcomings; a reluctance to promote ourselves and a readiness to speak well of others rather than demean them.



A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses

Theme: Humility

Introduction

Humility is difficult to speak about because we can easily give the impression that we are claiming to be humble ourselves – which is not a humble thing to do!

Humility is not easy to achieve because if we think we have achieved it, we most probably have not done so!

But the Bible says that we must humble ourselves – so how can we do it? Humility will come to us indirectly as we think seriously and deeply about the following –

I The greatness of God

When we think of God as infinite in his power and wisdom seen in his creation, we realise how puny and insignificant we are.

II The depth of our need

Our sinfulness was so profound that there was no other way for God to save us apart from sending his Son to die on the cross. Pride cannot live with that.

III Our total dependence on God's love in Jesus Christ

This dependence continues through the process of preparing us for glory up to the moment of departure from this life. Dependent people have no reason to be proud. As we dwell on these things, pride will fade away and we will not realise what is happening to us.



Focus Point:

Things that are opposite that Christians hold together

It is characteristic of the Christian faith and experience that we are required to hold together things that, in themselves, seem to be contradictory. This is not easy, but it is evidence of the Holy Spirit's work in our minds and hearts that we can do so fairly successfully.

In our understanding of Christian doctrine, one example would be the twin truths of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. Another is the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is both God and man. In both of these examples we err if we emphasise one side more than the other. We also fail if we try to explain the relationship between them.

James and Paul represent two aspects of Christian experience that some people have thought to be contradictory. Paul dwells much on the work of the Holy Spirit within us and our need of faith. James stresses our personal responsibility. They are not in conflict. We are

Verse 17

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

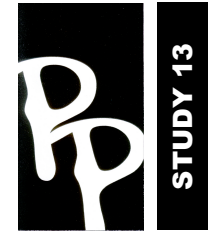
If we know that God requires us to submit our lives to him, with our aims and ambitions, and we fail to do so, James says that this is sin. But in making that clear to us, James moves from a particular example to a general principle. This general principle covers anything in which we know what we should do, but we fail to do it. This is called a sin of omission (from the verb to omit), which we tend to treat lightly as a matter to be regretted. (By contrast a sin of commission [from the verb to commit] is a sin we know we should not do, but do.) But James calls it sin, so it requires more than regret. Sin requires repentance before God and a plea for his pardon and cleansing (1 John 1:8-9).



Summary

The message of these verses can be summed up in the words of the prophet Micah, "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). Sadly, there were Christians in James' time who were acting arrogantly as they planned the future for themselves. They were like commercial traders, who acted as if they were in control of everything and could manipulate life to fit in with their wishes. Life is short and hangs by a thread. It is compared to mist, which appears and then suddenly goes. The Scripture has many warnings. We are not in control of the length of our lives. The Christian believer must recognise the sovereignty and will of God. James is not saying that before we make any decision we should always use a form of words such as "God willing", as a kind of ritual. His point is that a genuine Christian will want his or her whole life to be directed by the Lord. We will submit ourselves to him each day and we will believe that when our plans are hindered in any way or at any time, it is the Lord's intervention and it will be better for us.

GOD WILLING



James 4:13-17

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: The doctrine of God's providence
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

The lesson of these verses seems so well known that we might be surprised to find it here. But it is the simple lessons that we so often forget, and as with this one, our neglect can indicate deeper problems. The connection with the previous verses is easy to see. Nowhere is human pride more clearly seen than when we live our lives without reference to God, as though he does not exist. This is the folly that James deals with here.

What these verses mean

Verse 13

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."

James says, "Now listen," because he wants to alert people whose minds are set on their own way of life and who do not normally stop to take stock of what they are doing. We can imagine a group of traders poring over a map and pointing to one place and then another. The only thing in their minds is their plans, and they can already relish the

pleasure of the profits they will make from their trading. James is not just addressing Christian believers who are traders, he uses those generally in commercial business as an illustration to make an important point for all believers. Such traders display an attitude which all believers can so easily adopt. What then are these attitudes? Notice how the phrase “we will” is relevant with each phrase.

you who say	the outward sign of a whole attitude of life which is total arrogance. The idea that there could be failure in their plan has not even been part of their thinking.
[we will] today or tomorrow	looking into the future to make specific plans as to what will take place.
we will go to this or that city	it is as if they own the place and speak about their business as if nothing in the world could stop them
[we will] spend a year there	no account is taken of other things that could affect or change their timetable. The heart is stupidly secure and utterly insensible
[we will] carry on business and make money	not just making money but the love of making it. That was the whole purpose of the exercise.

In all this God does not feature anywhere in the plans being made.

Verse 14

Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.

We might want to ask, what is wrong with a group of businessmen planning like this? Surely they would be very poor at their job if they made no plans? James would agree with that so far, but then he makes the statement that immediately exposes the problem. He says, in effect, here you are planning a whole year’s work, when, for example, you do not even know if, for you, tomorrow will exist (Prov. 27:1). Such people want to be independent but God says that they are ignorant. Look how James continues.

What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

James has not yet mentioned God in this passage, but he is compelling us to face facts that will drive us to realise how dependent we are on God. Having exposed our ignorance about the future he now points to the evidence of our frailty and the uncertainty of life itself. The illustration James uses is the mist that lingers for a little while and then quickly disappears. In God’s timescale this is how the life of a person appears to him. The prophet Daniel reminded the Babylonian king Belshazzar, “God holds in his hand your life” (Dan. 5:23). Jesus told the parable of a rich farmer to whom God said, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you” (Luke 12:20). Since life itself is so fragile and uncertain, it is foolish for us to place all our confidence in our plans, our wisdom or our skills.

Verse 15

Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.”

Some people react to the uncertainty of life by indulging in a life of pleasure: “Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die” (1 Co.15:32). This is as foolish as laying plans as though we can be sure of the future. Other people conclude that the best thing is to do nothing because we cannot be sure of anything. But a Christian is right to make plans as the apostle Paul did (Rom. 15:23-29; Philm. 22). James’ teaching continues the theme of humility we found in the last study. We are to live all the time aware of our dependence on God. Too often we make our plans and then add “God willing”, when it would be better for us to say this, and mean it, before we begin to think about what we want to do. An unbeliever says, “It is my life and I can please myself what I do with it.” A true believer may not use the words “God willing” before every decision, but his or her whole attitude of life will be, “My life belongs to God and I want always to please him in everything I do and his will is always best.”

Verse 16

As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.

The reference to boasting and bragging is to empty, loud-mouthed arrogance. The sense of the original Greek words used is claiming something which is false. Here James is saying that men are boasting that they can make a success of life without any reference to God. Such boasting is false because the person is not in control of everything. It is godless and therefore it is evil.

4. *Events fully caused by God and fully caused by the creature*

The cause of many things that happen, such as grass growing and rain falling, can be explained. However, it would be incorrect to reason that if we know the natural cause of something in this world then God did not cause it. Nor is it correct to think that events are partly caused by God and partly caused by other factors. God works and directs through the distinctive properties of each created thing. So events can be 100% attributable to God and 100% attributable to the created world. The divine cause of each event works as invisible, behind the scenes. This is the primary cause that plans and initiates everything that happens. But the created thing brings about actions in ways consistent with the creature's own properties, ways that can often be identified by observation. These are the secondary causes of everything that happens and the most evident to us.

5. *The affairs of nations*

Scripture speaks of God's providential control of human affairs. God makes great nations and destroys them (Job 12:23). He rules the nations (Ps. 22;28). He determined the time of existence and the place of every nation on earth (Acts 17:26) and the governing authorities (Rom. 13:1).

6. *All aspects of our lives*

This is the most difficult for us to work out and apply. Yet Scripture throughout affirms that God brings about various events in our lives. This ranges from God planning our days before we were born (Ps. 139:16; Jer. 1:5; Gal. 1:15) to our daily food (Matt. 6:11). All our actions are under God's providential care. Success and failure come from God, our talents and abilities are fashioned by him. God influences the desires and decisions of people, especially in believers, working and willing them for his own good pleasure. All of these directions by God are unseen (primary causes), but this should not lead us to deny the reality of human choices and actions. Scripture affirms that people do really cause events to happen. We are significant and responsible. We have choices that bring about real results. God has made us in a wonderful way that has given us the property of willing choice. How does all this fit together? God causes all things that happen. He does so in a way that he somehow upholds our ability to make willing, responsible choices. These choices have real and eternal results for which we are accountable. Scripture does not explain how God combines his providential control with our willing and significant choices. We therefore have



A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses

Theme: Submission to God's way

If we are sincere when we say "God willing" what will this mean in practice?

I A right relationship with the Lord

- a. We will want our lives to be pleasing to the Lord.
- b. We will believe that his way is best for us, even if it is not what we would wish.

II A right understanding

A course of action cannot be according to God's will if it involves disobedience to his Word. For example –

- If our plan involves the deception of other people.
- If, as a believer, we plan to marry someone who is not a Christian
- If our plans mean the neglect of our family.
- If our plans hinder our regular fellowship with the Lord and with his people.

III A right attitude

Having committed our way to the Lord we should persevere in it.

- a. We must not think that we will have no problems. The disciples of Jesus went with him into a boat to cross the lake. The next thing was a tremendous storm, and then they saw their Lord's amazing control over nature as he calmed the storm with a word (Luke 8:22-25).
- b. When things go wrong we may think we have made a mistake or even that the Lord has deserted us. But as we persevere, we find he has something to show us we had not expected, and which would not have been possible if everything had gone as we planned.

Note This is the life of faith to which the Lord has called us.



Focus Point:

The doctrine of God's providence

The title we have given to this study is “God willing”. It concerns the future and our attitude to what is completely unknown to us human beings. Many people wake up each morning not knowing that it will be their last morning on this earth. Before the day is finished their life has gone – tragically, unexpectedly, accidentally, sorrowfully. None of us knows when our last day will be. An event may occur which changes our lives – a bereavement, accident, war, natural disaster, economic collapse, relationship breakdown, becoming rich, falling in love etc. People look to the future and make plans without taking into account any of the above possibilities. When all these events happen each and every day, it is because of the chaotic world in which we live and which is out of control. What James has been implying is that God, the all powerful Creator, is in control and the Christian believer wants his or her life to conform to God's will. So as the Christian thinks of tomorrow and beyond, it is in the context of God's great plan. Plans that are made are made with God in mind and pleasing to him. If the plan is cut short or cannot take place because of an event, then the believer acknowledges that the plan was subject to God's purposes and God has overruled. The Christian is able to do this because of the biblical doctrine of the providence of God.

The doctrine of God's providence is a difficult one for our finite minds to grasp and understand. Every believer comes to the point where he or she has to believe the doctrine even if they do not fully understand how it fits in with other teaching of Scripture.

Definition of the doctrine¹

God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he

- (1) keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them (*preservation*)
- (2) co-operates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do (*working in agreement*)
- (3) directs them to fulfil his purpose (*government*)

Preservation

God preserves all things he has made (Col. 1:17; Heb 1:3). He also causes them to maintain their properties with which he created them. God preserves water that it continues to act like water. He makes grass to continue like grass. He causes the paper on which this sentence is printed to act like paper, so that it does not dissolve into water or change into a living plant. It will retain its properties until it is acted upon by some other part of creation and its properties changed – for example being burnt by fire. The paper will continue to act like paper so long as God preserves the earth and the creation that he has made.

God's providence provides a basis for science. God has made and continues to sustain a universe that acts in predictable ways. Man was able to visit the moon because scientists could rely on and be confident in unchanging factors. Every moment of the day there are planes flying in the sky because of the stable, unchanging properties (and their laws) of the universe. The fuel that was put into a car yesterday to make that vehicle go will have the same effect tomorrow and next year. The reason for that is because God's providence sustains a universe in which created things maintain the properties with which he created them.

Working in agreement

God brings about all things according to his will (Eph. 1:11). No event in creation takes place that is outside his providence. This is hidden from our eyes unless we read it in Scripture. It is not clearly evident from the observation of the natural world around us. Wayne Grudem lists eight areas in which the universe works in agreement with God's design.

1. Inanimate creation

There are many things that happen in creation which we think of as natural occurrences, but the Bible states that God causes them to happen (Ps. 148:8; Job 37:6-13). The grass grows, the stormy wind blows, the snow falls, the earthquake shakes the ground.

2. Animals

God feeds the animals and the birds (Ps. 104:27-29; Matt. 6:26, 10:29).

3. Random or chance events

Casting lots or throwing dice is typical of random events. The outcome of such an event is from God (Prov. 16:33).

to accept both so as to be faithful to the teaching of all Scripture and not fall into the situation where we deny one aspect or other.

7. *Providence and evil*

The question that is often asked when a disaster or evil thing happens is: “Why did God allow it?” If God does cause everything that comes about in the world then the question arises of the relationship between God’s responsibility and the evil that takes place. Scripture is clear that God does not do anything evil. He does cause evil things to come about through the willing action of moral creatures. God cannot be blamed for any evil or for taking pleasure in anything evil. Human beings must take all responsibility for the evil they do. God hardened Pharaoh’s heart and Pharaoh also hardened his own heart. The evil that Pharaoh did arose out of the evil desires of his heart. The purpose behind God’s hardening Pharaoh’s heart was that so God could show his power so that God’s name may be proclaimed in all the earth (Rom. 9:17). God is not to be blamed for evil that he has brought about through secondary agents. Very often God uses events, including evil human beings, to bring judgement on sin. This is probably the best way we can understand how God can righteously bring about evil events. All human beings are sinful creatures and none deserve God’s favour or mercy. Therefore, when God brings evil on human beings, whether to discipline them, lead them to repentance or to bring judgement and condemnation on hardened sinners, God is not doing wrong. Everything works in God’s good purposes to bring glory to him and his people. In punishing evil in those who are not saved in Christ, God is glorified through the demonstration of his justice, holiness and power (Ex. 9:16; Rom. 9:14-24). The most evil deed of all history was ordained by God. This was the crucifixion of Christ – God’s holy servant. God predestined this to take place (Acts 4:27) and yet it was lawless men who crucified and killed him (Acts 2:23). God’s plan and foreknowledge are linked with the moral blame of the actions of lawless men. They were not forced by God to act against their wills. God brought about his plan through their willing choices for which they were responsible.

8. *Free will*

If God exercises providential control over all events does man have a free will? Man cannot act outside of God’s sustaining and controlling activity. He cannot make decisions that are not caused by anything external to himself. In that sense man is not free otherwise Hebrews 1:3 would not be true. It is not possible for man to

be totally free of God's control. However, man is free to make willing choices that have real effects. God does not place restrictions on man's will to make decisions. We act in accordance with our own desires. In that sense we have a free will. If we did not have such free will, then we would be subject to fatalism or determinism and would conclude that our choices do not matter or that we cannot really make willing choices.¹

Government

God has a purpose in all he does and he governs all things so that his purposes will be accomplished. He does everything according to his will, in the host of heaven and amongst the inhabitants of the earth (Dan. 4:35). God is sovereign over all and works his purposes out in every event that happens.

Conclusion

God works through human actions in his providential management of the world. The danger is that we neglect human responsibility in the light of God's sovereignty. In God's providence we are still responsible for our actions, which have real and eternal consequences. Obeying God brings about reward and eternity with God. Disobedience leads to punishment and eternity without God. Our actions do have real results and change the course of events. Neglect of my body will cause a likely earlier death than if I look after it. God has ordained that events will come about by our causing them. However we do not know what God has planned, but by trusting and obeying him we will discover the good things that he has planned. We should take care in exercising wisdom and caution in our lives. God has ordained prayer as a significant means of bringing results about in the world. We discover that God has ordained our prayer to bring about significant changes in the world. The doctrine of God's providence should make us act and not sit around waiting for things to happen. This doctrine should encourage the Christian believer to trust in God's sovereign control with the realisation that the use of the ordinary means is necessary for things to come about in the way that God has planned them.

The material used in preparing this Focus Point was taken from Wayne Grudem's Bible Doctrine – Essential teachings of the Christian faith (Inter-Varsity Press).

¹ We freely choose according to our nature, which is sinful. Therefore apart from grace all our free choices are governed and contaminated by our sin. Indeed prior to conversion even those choices considered to be good in the eyes of men are in fact sinful

Footnote continued on page 119



Over to you

People in your society may be very fatalistic. Does this view of life come into your church? If so, how would you deal with the problem?

As a church leader, do you plan your ministry and the work of the church? If not, should you? If you do, in what attitude do you undertake your planning?

It is our privilege to train our people to order their church life and their personal lives according to the Lord's pattern that he has given us in the Scriptures: that is, to think biblically. Has this been the aim of your ministry?

Footnote continued from page 118

ones because they were not done for the glory of God (e.g. Sacrifices and prayers are unacceptable to God, see Proverbs 15:8, 21:4, 28:9). We freely choose according to our fallen sinful nature and therefore have no ability to do good works that are pleasing to God, which is why we need his grace to be at work in our hearts to change us. In this sense the only people to have a genuinely free will with the equal ability to good or evil were Adam and Eve. We now have a freed will.

of hosts”¹ and tells us that he is sovereign over all things. This would give the utmost comfort to those who suffered, and should have struck terror into the hearts of those who had robbed them. The expression “ears of the Lord”, which is also used in Psalm 18:6, does not mean that God has a body with arms, eyes and ears. It is picture language, helping us to understand that God receives our prayers and understands our problems. We see here how important it is for us to gain our knowledge of what God is like from the way he has told us about himself in the Bible. Some people think of God as so majestic and awesome that he cannot possibly be interested in individual people out of the millions on earth. For others God is a loving Father, but with no control over what happens in the world or over the future. The truth is expressed in one of our songs:-

He’s got the whole world in his hands,
He’s got the tiny little baby in his hands.

which means that God is very wonderful indeed! (see also Psalm 138:6).

Verse 5

You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence.

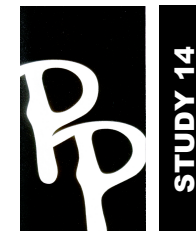
The wealth of the rich made it possible for them to live with plenty all around them. Whatever they desired or whatever whim suddenly came to them, nothing was denied them. The danger in these circumstances is that they most often lead to self-indulgence, and this leads to a slackening of moral standards. The language could have been borrowed from Amos 6:4-6 or from our Lord’s parable in Luke 16:19-31.

You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.

The self-indulgent rich person here is likened to animals that are being fattened ready for the market and the butcher. On the very day they are due to be taken away, they will be feeding well, not realising that death is so near. This is unflattering language, but it reflects the truth that those who live without reference to God, and for whom physical pleasure is the main thing in life, are not better than the animals that have no fear of God. The big difference is that while for the animals death is the end, humans are “destined to die once, and after that to face judgement” (Heb.9:27), and death may come much sooner than they expect.

¹ The usual word for Almighty (*pantokrator* – creator of all) is not used here but the Old Testament phrase *kurios Sabaoth*, which means “Lord of hosts”. The word host means an army and is used of God’s spiritual army – the angels in heaven and the heavenly bodies. The title of “Lord of hosts” shows the power of God and his authority as ruler over all the universe. (A Dictionary of Bible Symbols –Grace Publications).

WEALTH HAS DANGERS



James 5:1-6

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Note on riches and wealth
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: Slavery
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

These verses about the misuse of wealth follow from the warning to businessmen in the last section. There they did not refer to God in their planning. Here they ignore God in the use and abuse of their accumulated riches. There is a difference of opinion about whether or not those addressed here are Christians. Those who say they are not Christians argue that Christians could not possibly live like the people who are described here. They point to the threats of judgement here, and they think that, when James says in verse 7, “Be patient, then, brothers...”, this is in contrast to the rich ungodly people of verses 1-6. The other view is that sadly there have always been those who profess to be Christians who have allowed their wealth to lead them into the kind of attitudes and conduct that James condemns. This would be quite consistent with the purpose of this letter, as we have traced it through, to compel church members, professing Christians, to see if their lives match up to their profession. If they do not, then they must repent and reform, or they will prove that they are not true Christians, and they are on the road to judgement.

What these verses mean

Verse 1

Now listen, you rich people,

Although these verses are addressed to “you rich”, this does not mean they have nothing to say to other people. As we will see, the principle of relating our lives to God and eternity applies to both rich and poor. So does the requirement of honesty. Furthermore, if the greed of the rich is wrong, so is jealousy of the rich on the part of the poor (Prov. 30:7-9; Phil. 4:11). It would seem that many rich professing Christians known to James had the same faults, but this should not lead us to think that it is wrong for Christians to be rich. In the Old Testament, Solomon (2 Chron.1:11-12) and Job (Job 1:1-3) were very wealthy, while in the New Testament the Lord was helped by rich women (Luke 8:1-3) and was buried in a rich man’s tomb (Matt. 27:57-60). But, because of the dangers that wealth brings, Jesus himself said it was difficult to be both rich and a true Christian (Matt.19:23-26).

weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you.

Weeping and wailing are the cries of mourning when the person is dead and life has finished. This is what the selfish rich ought to feel at the prospect of the just judgement of God. The misery that James warns about can take different forms. It may be a reference to the ease with which riches can lose their value, or even to the violence of robbery. The poor can be thankful that they do not have worries like that! Riches do not always bring happiness and they can be a source of dispute and discord, or they may no longer give pleasure or satisfaction to those who have them. But, in the absence of genuine repentance and submission to the Lord, the misery may be the final banishment from God’s presence at the judgement.

Verse 2

Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes.

Surely James had in mind the words of Jesus (Matt.6:19-21). The rich spent their money on fine clothes (Luke 16:19). Some were so rich that their discarded garments were moth-eaten. What foolishness – feeding moths! James is reminding his readers that the rich will lose their wealth because all that they can purchase is of a temporary nature. Their riches cannot acquire for them the lasting things of eternity.

Verse 3

Your gold and silver are corroded.

Gold and silver do not rot, but their value can diminish. Or it may seem that they no longer give the enjoyment and satisfaction that once they did. Earthly treasures are in a state of irreversible decay from their beginning. Gold and silver are useless currencies in establishing a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Those for whom gold and silver are everything will have nothing except their sins when they stand before the judgement seat of God. Such precious metal will be of no value.

Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days.

The phrase “the last days” normally refers to the period between the resurrection of Jesus and his coming return to judge the world. Sometimes, as here, the focus is on the judgement towards which the whole world is moving. The exact meaning of James here is not clear, but he seems to be saying that the very rotting of the wealth that the rich are hoarding will be evidence of their greed and their abuse of God’s gifts. Such abuse will bring them into the fires of the judgement to come. We may wonder why God’s judgement comes down so heavily on hoarding. In the case of the rich being exposed by James, the sin is in the sheer greed of amassing more than they can use, and in the process of depriving others of a share. God hates all hoarding that is unfair to those less fortunate.

Verse 4

Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you.

Here is another reason for God’s wrath. The wealth of the rich had been accumulated by dishonest means. God’s law required wages to be paid promptly (Deut. 24:14-15); this would be both honest and compassionate (see also Mal. 3:5 and Col. 4:1). Unpaid wages crying out is called “personification” – that is making things act as though they are human. This form of expression is often used in poetry, for example, in Psalm 65:13, the meadows are said to “shout for joy and sing”. James goes on to explain –

The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.

In order to emphasise the strength and ability of the one who hears the harvesters’ cries, James uses a title of the Lord that means “The Lord



Over to you

What kind of impact on your society would be made by a church comprised of contented people?

Is the gaining of riches a problem in your society? Does it rub off on members of your congregation? How can this passage in James help?

Do you consider the work of the gospel suffers because of lack of funds? Is giving prominence to finance the right way of approaching gospel work?

Verse 6

You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.

The most probable meaning here is that robbing men of their wages had resulted in some cases in starvation and death because the victims had no means of defending themselves or of claiming their rightful dues. Wives and children may also have suffered and even died as a result. It is not an exaggeration, nor is it unjust to call this murder!



Summary

James has been writing to Christian believers on practical matters of life, to put right the mismatch of what people said they believed and how they lived. Our study of the opening six verses of chapter five deals with the practical matter of wealth. The background could well have been the style of many Jewish businessmen, whilst the majority of readers of the letter would have been Jewish Christians. The lesson to all believers is clear. Accumulating useless wealth for selfish purposes will be judged by God as wicked. Behind what James says in these verses, is the fact that wealth or possessions are a trust from God. If we misuse them we bring misery on other people and, in the end, misery on ourselves. James cites examples of the wrong use of wealth - when workers are robbed of their wages, the rich live in luxury and people suffer and die as a result of selfish action.



Note on riches and wealth

Wealth and riches are big stumbling blocks for many Christians. The Bible does not condemn riches in themselves but constantly warns against their abuse. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Most Christian believers are unable to handle wealth without becoming affected by selfish desires. Money has ruined many a gospel work in recent years because the sudden influx of funds has caused greed, jealousies and suspicions

Continued on page 126

Note on riches and wealth continued from page 125

amongst fellow-believers. There is unbiblical teaching going around, which says wealth and success are the marks of faithfulness to the Lord. The name given to this is the wealth and prosperity gospel. This is the very thing that James is warning against because we do not measure eternal things by temporal, earthly values.

A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses

Theme: Wealth – wrong and right attitudes to it

1. There is nothing wrong with the possession of wealth.

- a. Some Old Testament saints were rich such as Solomon (2 Chron. 1:11-12) and Job (Job 1:1-3; 42:12).
- b. In the New Testament, Jesus used the help of rich people (Luke 8:1-3) and was buried in a rich man's tomb (Matt.27:57-60).

2. We can have wrong attitudes to wealth.

- a. We can envy those who have possessions and even covet them. God's command is that we should not covet (Ex.20:17). We forget that those who are rich have heavy responsibilities we would not want; they often have fears and burdens we know nothing about. We also forget that riches can easily disappear.
- b. People can regard riches as something to be gained by any means. The means may be dishonest business transactions. The means may be robbing others of their just dues.

3. Wealth or lack of it can have a bad effect on us.

- a. Our Lord taught that riches can harden the heart so that it is difficult to come to repentance and to faith in him (Matt. 19:23-26).
- b. Poor people can allow their poverty to make them bitter against God.
- c. There is a pride in riches and pride in poverty – both are spiritually harmful.

4. There is a right attitude to what we have, much or little.

- a. What we have is God's gift to us – more than we deserve.
- b. What we have is God's trust to us, to be rightly used.
- c. Authorities and family (and employees, if any), have a moral claim upon us according to our ability.

The needs of our local church and of the spread of the gospel should be high in our priorities. We should show compassion on the needy (Gal.6:10).



Focus Point:

Slavery

Slavery has always been a great evil and it is good that it has been condemned and banished from many parts of the world. But it still exists in societies where people are treated as no better than animals, and in such evils as child abuse in which the victims are robbed of their human dignity for the sake of sordid gain.

The Bible does not condemn slavery in direct language; rather it lays down principles which, if they are followed, make slavery impossible. One reason for this is that as history has unfolded slavery has taken different forms, so, by laying down principles, the Bible proves to be adequate for each generation and each new form of this evil.

The first and most basic principle is that all people are made by God and are made in his image. It follows that every human being is equal to every other human being in God's sight.

Flowing from this first principle comes the requirement of justice for all. There is not one person to whom justice should not be applied. Even the hardened criminal has the right to justice and so has anyone who is employed by another.

Then there is the principle of accountability of all people to God for the way we have used our lives and the way we have managed our relationships with other people. Here the requirements of love to God and love to others come into focus. We must all without exception answer to God for our dealings with our fellow-humans, and how far love and honesty have prevailed in our lives.

Verse 11

As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered.

These words reflect Matthew 5:11-12, but it is well to bear in mind that the word “blessed” has a wide breadth of meaning, for example happy, to be envied, spiritually rich, within the orbit of God’s grace. Perhaps here the meaning is that those who have persevered through much testing prove by this very perseverance that they are those who have received God’s grace and continue to do so.

You have heard of Job’s perseverance

The change of word from patience in verse 10 to perseverance in verse 11 is both important and encouraging. James could not honestly have said that Job was patient because he constantly rebelled against his situation; he was irritable with his friends and complained to God (see for example Job chapters 3 and 16). But he never forsook God despite the terrible things that happened to him (Job 1 and 2). This is encouraging to us because, like Job, we do not always react to trouble as we should, and few of us live up to the high standard James has been setting for us in verses 7-9. But, though we stumble, we do not fall; we go on in the faith; we trust where we cannot see. By God’s grace we persevere. “He who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matt.10:22).

and have seen what the Lord finally brought about.

Job did not have to wait for the Lord’s return before receiving the fruit of his painful experience. The most important benefit was a new understanding of God, his glory and his dealings with us (see Job 42:1-6). This is the kind of thing Paul had in mind (Rom. 5:3-5) and Peter also (1 Pet.1:6-7).

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

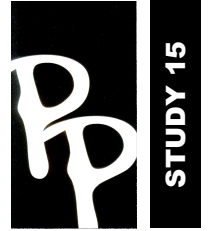
See Psalm 103:8. There are two good reasons for us to remember this. Firstly, we easily forget it when life is hard and we may be tempted to complain that God has forgotten us or is being unfair to us. God is not only dealing with us with wisdom, he also has a father’s compassion and carefulness (Ps.103:13-14). Secondly, we need to remember this when we fail to be patient in our trials. God is not a slave-master, nor is he reluctant to pardon us, because as James says, he is full of compassion and mercy.

Verse 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.

LIVING IN THE LIGHT

OF THE LORD’S RETURN



James 5:7-12

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: The Second Coming
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

There must have been a lot of trials among the churches to whom James was writing because the theme is never far from his mind – he began with it in the opening verses of the letter (1:1-12). An important part of our Christian witness is that our response to trials, sufferings or injustice is different from the reaction of unbelievers to such things. In our present passage James teaches us to handle these difficult things in the light of the personal return of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the process there are a number of other lessons here arising from our Lord’s future return.

What these verses mean

Verse 7

Be patient, then, brothers,

James now turns to the people who have been hurt by unjust treatment on the part of the worldly rich. He is not saying that it is wrong for them to feel the pain. By exercising patience, James means they must

not react in a sinful way by a show of temper or violence, or by complaining against God.

until the Lord's coming.

They were tempted to despair because there was nothing they could do about their situation, and there seemed to be no end in sight. But there was an end in sight, the Lord's coming. We are to live out the Christian life in the light of Jesus Christ. We have his example from his first coming, his cross and resurrection. Also we must look to Jesus Christ, who in God's time will return to the earth. He will bring both judgement on the ungodly and deliverance and justice for his people. The teaching here does not discourage helping ourselves if we are able to do so. Paul twice used the law by pointing to his citizenship of Rome to help him in an unjust situation (Acts 16:37; 22:22-29). But when we cannot help ourselves we are not to despair.

See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains.

James once again uses an agricultural illustration to make his meaning clear. The farmer's patience has two stages. Having done his part in preparing the soil and sowing the seed, he needs the autumn rains to give the seed a good start. Then he must wait patiently for the crop to grow, the spring rain to fill it out, and the reaping. In dire situations Christians have two aids to their patience - the immediate promise of the Lord to give them strength and endurance, and the ultimate promise of his coming when justice will be done and will be seen to be done.

Verse 8

You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

The Lord's return is described here as his "coming". It could be translated "arrival", because the thought is not so much of the process of his coming, but of his arriving and being present with his people. Since many centuries have passed already and the Lord has not yet returned, we might wonder at James saying that the coming was near. We can explain this in two ways. Firstly, from the perspective of eternity, the period up to the Lord's coming will be short. Second, we are in the latter days, the period between the Lord's resurrection and his coming, and it would seem that James is saying that the time span involved has been measured, it will not last for ever. We should pause to consider the amazing thing that James assumes is possible to these believers. Here are people deprived of their livelihood by greedy, heartless landowners. They have no means of claiming their rights

and some of the families may be starving to death. These people are told to be patient and to stand firm. They must hold fast to the Lord and to the gospel, and not fall into unbelief or despair. That Christians down the ages have reacted to injustice like that, and that many still do, is one of the greatest proofs one could have of the validity of our faith and of the Spirit's work in human hearts (Gal. 5:22-23).

Verse 9

Don't grumble against each other, brothers,

Even minor irritations can bring out the worst in us; how much more when we are under extreme testings by our circumstances? It is a common experience that when life is difficult, we tend to become impatient and quarrelsome even with those who are dear to us, or other members in the fellowship of the church. But James will not allow us to make excuses for ourselves. He tells us not to do it; such conduct is out of harmony with our profession as believers.

or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

As Paul tells us, "We must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ" (2 Co. 5:10). One of the things for which we will have to give account to the Lord will be how we have related to our fellow-believers. If our fellowship with them has been positive, this will be pleasing to the Lord. (Consider Malachi 3:16-17 and Hebrews 10:24-25.)

Verse 10

Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

If James' readers, or we, should want to say that he has set us an impossible standard, James is ready with the answer. There are people who have passed the test. When Stephen made his great speech, for which he was martyred, he said, "Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute?" (Acts 7:52), confirming the words of Jesus (Matt. 23:29-36). An outstanding Old Testament example is Jeremiah. He faithfully taught God's message to the people, but he was constantly harassed and opposed, until at last he was thrown into a deep well with mud on the bottom of it (Jer. 38:1-13). Later, after he was freed from there, he was bound by chains and treated like a slave (Jer. 40:1). He was certainly patient and did not retaliate, and he stood firm, never wavering from obedience to God and the message he was called on to give. Jeremiah, Elijah and Daniel were among those our Lord had in mind in Matthew 5:11-12.

views on a doctrine, the details of which are kept vague by the Scriptures. A veil has been placed by God deliberately, so not even the Son, when he was on earth the first time, knew the detail of his own return.

Source used: *A Dictionary of Theological Terms* – M. E. Manton (Grace Publications) and *Bitesize Theology* – Peter Jeffery (Evangelical Press).



Over to you

Until studying this passage, how did you counsel those in your congregation who were passing through the various difficulties of life? Would you now take a different approach?

In the light of this study, how should you preach and teach the return of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Do you hesitate to encourage the poorest people in your church to be contented in the light of Romans 8:18?

The connection of this verse with what has gone before is not very clear. Perhaps, under stress, some people were tempted to make hasty promises or even vows. Difficult or painful situations do tend to open the way to careless language, or even to using the Lord's name in a flippant manner and thus breaking the third commandment (Ex. 20:7) which leads to condemnation. Whatever the connection, or even if there is no connection, James here follows the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5:33-37. People speak with oaths because they are not sure that others will believe what they are saying. Perhaps they have not always been honest, so other people have good reason to question what they say. Christian people should be noted for their integrity, so that they have no need to swear by anything or anyone. These are days when politicians and business people increasingly say one thing but mean another. Often their words have to be interpreted by commentators. In this, as in many other areas of life, Christians must be different.



Summary

The return of Jesus Christ is a very important doctrine because it is the Christian answer to the widespread pain, injustice and oppression in the world. There is to be punishment for the ungodly, and there will be peace and joy for those who fear God and look to him for mercy. The return of the Lord is also important because it is an incentive for us to live in a way that pleases God in our response to our circumstances, and in our relationship with others. Christians are to be patient and to stand firm, avoiding grumbling against each other. Difficult situations cannot be used as an excuse; all are still answerable and accountable to God. We have examples from the Old Testament to look to, especially Job. He did not get everything right in his situation, but he persevered in the Lord and was brought through his trials during his own lifetime on earth. God is a compassionate and merciful God and ready to forgive us when we recognise our failings in these matters. Above all, Christians are to be honest, so that people can believe what they say and promise without their having to resort to oaths.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Theme: The importance of the Lord's return

The fact that Jesus Christ will one day return to the earth must be important because all the writers in the New Testament mention it, and some of them do frequently. Without these references the gap would be very large, and the teaching would be hopelessly incomplete.

1. It is important for the world

When Jesus returns, the world will be cleansed by fire from all impurity and imperfection and he will bring in the new heaven and earth (Rom. 8:19-21; 2 Pet.3:10-13).

2. It is important for the ungodly

This is because our Lord will come to judge them (2 Thess.1:7-10; Matt.25:31-32).

3. It is important for Christian believers

All opposition to them will be destroyed (2 Thess.2:8). They will be gathered in one great family (1 Thess.4:18). It will be their final salvation (Heb.9:28; 1 Cor.15:51-52; Phil. 3:20-21).

This is our great hope and comfort (John 14:1-4; 1 Thess.4:10).



Focus Point: The Second Coming

The English phrase "Second Coming" is not in Scripture, though the New Testament teaches 318 times that Christ will return. The doctrine has plenty of references, but it is controversial because the Bible never tells us when Jesus will return. Times and dates are avoided and the appearance of Jesus will be sudden and unexpected.

When Christ comes again it will be a personal and physical coming. Several Greek words are used to describe the return

<i>Parousia</i>	presence with an arrival preceding (Phil. 1:16)
<i>Epiphaneia</i>	a public appearing (2 Tim. 4:1)
<i>Apocalypsis</i>	an unveiling (2 Thess. 1:7)

Hebrews 9:28 contrasts the Lord's first and second coming. The first was to deal with our sin. This involved Jesus becoming a servant, a man. He had to humble himself. He had to suffer death as the punishment for sin. In the second coming he will come to bring us salvation that is already accomplished. Christ will gather his saints, dead and living, to himself (1 Thess. 4:13-18). He will judge unbelievers (2 Thess. 2:8-10). He will come in triumph as King of Kings and Lord of Lords and set up a reign of righteousness (2 Pet. 3:10-13).

This is a comforting doctrine for the Christian believer. This doctrine helps the believer not only to bear the troubles and difficulties of this world (affliction, persecution, illness etc.), but to rejoice in them. The Christian can do this because he or she knows that this world is only temporary in nature and that when Christ returns there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

The principle of Christ's return is a doctrine accepted by Christian believers. The difficulties emerge in the details, especially in a reference in Revelation 20 to the millennium or thousand years. There are three broad views on this.

<i>Post-millennialism</i>	this view holds that the second coming of Christ will follow a thousand year period.
<i>Pre-millennialism</i>	this view holds that the return of Christ will come before the thousand year period.
<i>A-millennialism</i>	this view does not interpret the thousand years of Revelation 20 literally, but states that the millennium describes an undefined period of time. Usually this view holds that the second coming will take place after this period of time.

Each of the three positions has had support from amongst well-known Christians and theologians. The fact that such men could differ on the detailed interpretation of this doctrine underlines how we should avoid getting into argumentative viewpoints. The fundamental teaching has to be of the certainty of Christ's coming and the Christian's readiness for it. The detail is secondary and could take up a lot of unproductive time with inconclusive results. The danger is for churches and denominations to take a dogmatic approach and stipulate which position its members have to adopt. It would be sad to think that a person could be excluded from participating in membership of a local group of believers because he or she holds differing

Verse 15

And the prayer offered in faith

The prayer has to be offered by the elders in the name of the Lord (first key phrase) and also in faith (second key phrase). This means that the prayer offered is in the definite conviction that it has God's approval. Where something that is done without a conviction (faith) of its approval by God then it is sinful (Rom. 14:23). How do we gain a conviction that something is approved by God? There are a number of references in the New Testament to promises of prayers being answered. The promise is always governed by one thing, namely that prayer must be in accordance with God's will. In other words, we cannot alter God's will by the way we pray, whether it be loudly, with great fervour, persistence or clever argument. We cannot claim something that God has not promised or designed to do. If it is not God's will then neither medicine nor prayer will achieve the result that we want. Jesus did not heal everyone. In his sovereign purpose he physically healed some and allowed others to remain ill. Therefore prayer offered in faith is not something man can produce at will. It comes as a gift from God and can only be prayed when God gives assurance that its content will be answered in accordance with his sovereign purposes.

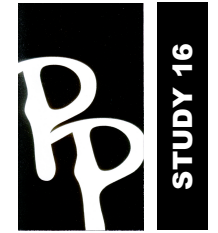
will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up.

The consideration of our two key phrases "in the name of the Lord" and "prayer in faith" will now help us to continue with this verse, which has created difficulties for many. This is because the two previous key phrases are not understood and the verse is taken to mean that the sick person will certainly be cured. The confusion then arises due to our experience where sick people are not always healed. Some have tried to resolve the problem by claiming that where healing has not occurred it is because of a lack of faith either in the patient or the elders, or both. Far from helping, this proposed solution is often untrue and causes much distress. It is better to ask ourselves what is meant by the promised healing (will it make the sick person well?). It can mean a complete cure from the illness, but it can also mean a strengthening to bear the distress. Not only so, we should not exclude the possibility that the Lord's purpose in the process is to help the sick person's transition from here to glory. We will see this principle worked out in verses 17 and 18 with the example of Elijah.

If he has sinned he will be forgiven.

This does not mean that illness is always caused by sin, nor even that it is often the case. But there are times when God shows his displeas-

PRAYER AND FELLOWSHIP



James 5:13-20

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Note: Sickness and healing
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Introduction to the passage

The subject of prayer follows naturally James' concern for those who are in trouble. Instead of yielding to the temptation to be irritable with other people (5:4), or even to utter impetuous oaths (5:12), the right thing is to pray. Then, as is normal with James, one thing leads to another so the thought of prayer opens up to various aspects of prayer in our experience, and the effect of this on our fellowship with our fellow church members.

What these verses mean

Verse 13

Is any one of you in trouble? ¹ He should pray.

It is natural for a Christian believer who is in any kind of trouble to talk to the Lord about it. This does not mean that the problem will certainly go away; it may do, but if not, prayer will certainly change

¹ See page 138 for text of footnote

our attitude to it, and give us strength to endure. It is distinctive of Christians that we take everything to God in prayer. We learn not to despair in the face of trouble and not to be over-elated in times of joy, but to be contented in the Lord (Phil.4:10-13).

Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.

We need to take note of the original Greek word used for happiness. The meaning is not a superficial euphoria, but a deep inner sense of well-being. The root of this word is used elsewhere in the New Testament and it is interesting to see the situations in which it is used. Firstly when Paul is before Felix (Acts 24:10) and in the shipwreck on Paul's journey to Rome. These are not events that one would look upon as being joyful. Yet the Christian finds inner peace, contentment and enjoyment of life in the midst of the turmoil of this world, just as Paul did. God does give believers material blessings, but this should not be the basis of the happiness James speaks of here. There is a natural tendency for us to turn to God when in trouble more than when things are going well. This is because when things are well we can so easily gain that feeling of independency. Material things that make us happy can draw us away from the Lord, so we should remind ourselves that they are gifts from God. The point James is making is that in times of pleasure and enjoyment we should not forget God. If there is a reason to make you genuinely happy then praise God. Do this by singing praise unto him. It identifies you as a Christian as you lift your heart in praise to him. It will help to stop pride. Instead of a person's being satisfied with their own success they will recognise it as of God's goodness.

Verse 14

Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church

This verse has given rise to many false ideas, so it will be good for us to consider it carefully. James is addressing the person who is sick. Again we must give attention to the original Greek word used by James. It means "without strength". So we are not talking about minor ailments, but a relatively serious condition where the probability is that the person is too ill to leave his or her bed. The point that matters is that the person is not well enough to go and receive help. What ought such a person to do? Call the elders of the church.

¹ Footnote relating to "trouble" from page 137

The original Greek word for trouble used here is made up of two words, "evil" and "to suffer". The meaning then is "to suffer the evil blows of the outside world". James is speaking of all the blows that come upon the Christian as he lives out his life in an alien world. These can be natural troubles, physical, mental, spiritual and special troubles. (John Blanchard, *Truth for Life*).

There has been a wide abuse of James' instruction. It should not be used as an excuse to add unnecessary burdens on church leaders. It should not be used to justify public healing services, because the elders must go to the patient, and the whole setting is the home and privacy. There is no mention anywhere in the New Testament of healing services. Elders, not professional healers, are to be called. It should not be used to justify any kind of priestly function such as "the last rites", because those called are elders and not priests, and as we shall see, the assumption is not that the patient will die, but will recover!

to pray over him

The elders of the church are to pray over the sick person who has called them. We see here the pastoral rôle of elders as they are to come to the sick person. They are to attend the place of suffering and pray within the sight and hearing of the sick person. Praying beside the sick person becomes more intimate and fervent than at a distance in another place. The sick person benefits as they become conscious of the effective power of prayer.

and anoint him with oil

The elders are to anoint the sick person with oil. This does not imply some kind of magical spell accompanied by a mystical form of words. It may be the oil had a medicinal purpose where this was needed. In our times this means that we accompany the doctor's efforts with prayer. Another suggestion is that the oil provided a kind of focal point for the patient's faith, but was not in itself necessary for the healing, as, for example, our Lord's use of mud in John 9:6. Whatever the explanation of the use of oil, it is clear that it was not of the first importance, and that the emphasis here and in the next verse is on the prayer.

in the name of the Lord.

This and the following phrase are the key to the meaning of these verses. The oil is symbolic as it does not contain the properties required for what is to follow. It is the power of the Lord that makes the difference and so prayer and anointing with the oil is done in his name. "In the name of the Lord" must mean at least two things;

1. reliance on the Lord's power (and not on the prayer or anything else that was done) and
2. submission to the Lord's plan or purpose.

We must bear these two principles in mind as we go on to the next verse.

1. If the wanderer is a true Christian, then the death from which he is saved when he is restored is possibly physical death to which waywardness can sometimes lead (1 Co.11:30-32).
2. The wanderer may be a professing but not genuine Christian. In that case, we have here a rescue from eternal death (Rev. 21:8) and in Christ his sins are covered. This interpretation goes outside the text because James is addressing Christians. However, a false Christian may come to realise their falseness by having their wrong understanding of Scripture and subsequent lifestyle put right and as a result come to true faith.
3. This is probably the interpretation that sits the most comfortably with the text. James is writing from the point of view of our fellow Christians observing our lives. When they see us wander in the way we talk and live, it raises in their minds the question whether we can truly be a Christian. God knows the true condition and that if the person has been saved already they cannot be saved for a second time; he or she is eternally secure. If I, as a back-slidden person, am restored, then people looking in from the outside would say that my soul has been saved from death. In their eyes that is where I was heading in the state that I was. The final words “and cover over a multitude of sins” would fit, because the restored person confesses their “wandering” sins, seeking God’s forgiveness. This is part of the continuing need for Christians to daily confess their sins.

The rescue of the wandering Christian is the work of Christ, but it is clear that he uses us in the process. What a wonderful and practical conclusion to James’ letter.

Note: Sickness and healing

How does the text that we have in 5:14-15 stand up in the modern technological world of today? Were the words that James wrote only relevant for his day? Would it be more sensible today to call a doctor rather than the elders of the church? The answer is that these verses apply to us today as they did in the early days of the New Testament church. Medical and technological advancements have not changed the principal reason for people recovering from sickness. They have greatly helped and it is true that today people are recovering from illnesses that only a few years ago they would have died from. In

ure with us and our illness is one way by which he lovingly leads us to repentance. There was certainly a connection between sickness and sin in the two incidents recorded in Mark 2:1-12 and John 5:1-15. But our Lord denied it in the case of the man born blind in John 9:1-5 and the mention of sin in this passage may well indicate a direct connection with the sickness of verse 14. When elders are called, it is part of their ministry to encourage repentance by the sick person for known sin. Such repentance will receive the Lord’s pardon (1 John 1:9).

Verse 16

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

Since the Lord readily forgives those who confess their sins to him, we must in turn be sure to be open with one another, seeking pardon and forgiving one another. This has nothing to do with the practice of confession of sin to a priest. For one thing, the sin here is in a personal relationship, and no other person, including a priest, is involved. For another thing, this is not one person such as a priest receiving the confessions of many people, but many people involved in a spiritual relationship with each other. This text has sometimes been used to justify the public confession of sins and faults. Such public confessions frequently lead to an unseemly exposure of immoral behaviour causing embarrassment, or to sinful self-advertisement. The confession James advocates is person to person, and he almost certainly had in mind our Lord’s teaching in Matthew 5:23-24, and he would include the need to forgive others when they offend us (Matt.6:14-15). The healing here is best understood in terms of a return to harmonious relationship – a healing of divisions and hurts.

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

James may be referring to the healing of the sick, or of spoiled relationships within the fellowship. In both cases prayer is involved and here James puts the emphasis on the prayer, not on any kind of ritual or of anointing with oil. A righteous man is a Christian by reason of his faith in Christ. Perhaps it also means one who is living consistently as a Christian. God works through prayer and it is one of the ways he brings about his sovereign purposes in the world. James illustrates his meaning here in the next verse.

Verse 17

Elijah was a man just like us.

For his case study James turns to Elijah. He was a man just like us,

experiencing the sufferings and trials of this world like we do today. We read of Elijah running away, being frightened and depressed. Yet it is in his weakness that the incident to which James now refers took place. It happened on the mountain when Elijah opposed the prophets of Baal. James highlights two incidents.

He prayed earnestly that it would not rain,

Elijah prayed that it would not rain. Actually there is no record of Elijah praying this. We have the Old Testament narrative in 1 Kings 17:1 that Elijah told Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, whom I serve, there will neither be dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.” How could Elijah have known this? God revealed his intentions to him.

and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years.

The words came true. The rest of 1 Kings 17 is set in the drought that followed. Chapter 18 begins with the words, “After a long time, in the third year ...” and Elijah is instructed to go and see Ahab again.

Verse 18

Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

In the instruction Elijah receives in 1 Kings 18:1 to see Ahab, God states that he will send rain upon the land. We then have the incident on Mount Carmel unfolding in the rest of chapter 18 when the rain did come. The whole point about Elijah mentioned by James is that having received God’s revelation Elijah praised God in prayer and earnestly asked that all would be fulfilled. Elijah was harnessing his prayers to the revealed will of God. The challenge is therefore for us to live close to God, to learn how to know his will, and so to pray effectively for God’s will to be fulfilled.

Verse 19

My brothers,

James starts his final comment of his letter with a phrase that he has used nearly twenty times. He is not writing to people outside of the church but to Christians. His parting words are a warning of the danger that all Christian believers face. The consequence of this danger is very serious. The concluding words sum up the practical nature of this whole letter and show the pastoral concerns of James.

if one of you should wander from the truth

The danger is wandering away from the truth. This means allowing irregularities to arise in our understanding of doctrine and conse-

quently our Christian lives. This danger is subtle because the word “wander” does not describe a deliberate digression, but a slow slipping away. Backsliding never begins with an outrageous, scandalous sin. It always begins slowly and quietly. All Christians are vulnerable, from the experienced preacher who has been a Christian for a long time, to the novice. This warning from James also stresses how important truth is. There are many in the Christian Church who think that doctrine does not matter. It certainly does, otherwise we would not have this warning about wandering from the truth. What we believe and how we live are interconnected. If we lose sight of the doctrine of sin, then our ethical and moral standards are lowered. If we neglect the doctrine of the Holy Spirit we begin to work in the energy of our own flesh and our power in service is lost. We can list many biblical doctrines and trace the consequences upon the life of the believer if they are neglected and ignored.

and someone should bring him back,

Our concern should be aroused when someone in the church strays from sound teaching, because we know that this will often lead to wayward conduct. Other references in the New Testament suggest that the person helping a backslider needs himself to be walking closely with God (see Galatians 6:1 as an example). James is addressing all Christians, not just the church leaders. It is a responsibility of duty for all members of the local congregation to be vigilant and caring. This is not the same as being negative and critical, having an unloving spirit to those we think are going backwards. This is a mutual ministry where we all need to be concerned for each other’s spiritual health.

Verse 20

remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

Having dealt with the danger and the duty to be alert, James now informs us of the consequence and rewards of this duty. The person who has wandered from the truth will be saved from death and his many sins will be covered. This is not an easy phrase to work out and can cause some to think that a Christian can be denied (or lose his) eternal salvation. Such a conclusion goes completely against the teaching of the Bible and would contradict statements such as Jesus made, “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand” (John 10:28). We will consider three explanations of this verse, all of which would fit biblically.

considering such matters our starting point is with God who is the creator and re-creator of all things. In every instance of healing he is the one who heals, whether he acts directly through unknown laws or directly through known laws.² Healing can be ascribed to a whole number of reasons. The complex healing of the mechanism of the body is a gift from God. The effect of fresh air and sun are gifts from God. Vitamins, protein, medicines are gifts from God. So are the diagnostician's and surgeon's skills. All these are means that God uses to restore health. God does use miraculous ways which defy all known laws of nature, but this must be seen alongside the known laws that account for the majority of cases of healing that takes place.



Summary

James' letter was written specifically to Christians to challenge any disparity that existed between what they believed (faith) and how they lived (works). In our present study, which forms the final part of the letter, James brings together the two factors of life's changeability and the Christian's attitude to life. The changeable factors are trouble and sickness. Every Christian is affected, but how do they respond to these factors? As James describes a condition he then gives advice as to how Christians should respond. The theme that runs through this section is prayer; prayer for ourselves in both sorrow and joy; prayer in times of physical weakness and prayer for one another in the course of Christian fellowship. The prayer has to be offered in faith and in the Lord's name for results to take place. Things will happen, not because the Christian prayed and persuaded God to act, but because the prayer will be in harmony with God's will and purpose. This James demonstrates through the example of Elijah. Whatever results from the troubles, sickness and care of the congregation for each other, all will have one thing in common – the glory of God. This will be the desire of the Christian believer and will govern his attitude and daily walk. That then should match up with his professed belief.

² Dr. Henry W. Frost *Miraculous Healing*



A suggestion of what you can preach about from these verses

Theme: Practical Christian fellowship

Church life is more than gathering for meetings. The life of a church is in its relationships, first with the Lord expressed in prayer and worship, and then with each other.

1. The relationship between the leaders and the people

The caring of elders is expressed in many ways and covers every aspect of the members' lives. Here the trust of the members in their leaders is seen in their calling for the elders' help in a time of extreme need.

2. The relationship of the members to each other

Again, this is expressed in all kinds of ways, but here it is in a sensitivity to one another's feelings, and an awareness when one has hurt another. Readiness to ask for forgiveness and to forgive is often very hard to achieve: it is a test of real love.

3. The relationship with wayward brothers and sisters

We have a natural reluctance to 'interfere' in other people's lives, and we naturally fear a rebuff if we try to warn those we fear are wandering. But Scripture provides for a rescue ministry. In addition to these verses, there are Colossians 3:16 and Hebrews 10:24-25. Illustrations are provided in Matthew 7:3-5 and John 13:12-15.



Focus Point: Elders

These were the leaders in the New Testament churches. There was no longer a place for anyone to function as a priest, offering animal sacrifices as in the Old Testament. This was because Jesus Christ had offered himself as the one sacrifice "for all time" (Heb. 10:12). Now, all believers are priests having direct access to God through Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:9) and offering sacrifices of spiritual worship (Rom.12:1-2; Heb. 13:15; 1 Pet.2:4-5).

Elders were appointed as soon as possible after churches were formed (Acts 14:23), to direct the affairs of the church. These men were committed to preaching and teaching (1 Tim.5:17). Paul gives qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. In the same chapter he identifies deacons, whose task was to assist the elders, relieving them of work which would divert them from the more spiritual aspects of church life, after the pattern of Acts 6:1-6. Paul instructs Titus on appointing elders in the churches on the island of Crete (Titus 1:5-9).

Elders are called "overseers" (Acts 20:28; Phil.1:1; 1 Tim.3:1-2); and they are seen to exercise a pastoral or caring ministry (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet.5:1-4 shepherds of God's flock). A study of all of these references will show that there were often a number of elders in each local church sharing leadership responsibility. Other names used for elders are "bishop" and "presbyter". All these different names describe the same function of leadership of the local community of believers (i.e the church).



Over to you

What emphasis is there upon prayer in your church? In what spirit do people pray? How much is God's will sought in prayer?

Are you afraid to speak to your members personally when you see signs of spiritual decline in them?

Are you so quick to warn them that you cause resistance and resentment?

To get that balance right do you ask the Lord to make you wise and sensitive in every aspect of your pastoral care?