

ADRIAN ROGERS

LEGACY

C O L L E C T I O N



J A M E S

These transcripts are taken straight from live audio recordings of Adrian Rogers during his tenure as pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. As such some of the transcripts may contain stutters, stammers, transcription errors, and other authentic remarks as would be common in a live setting.

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The Power of Patience

By Adrian Rogers

Sermon Date: August 24, 1986

Main Scripture Text: James 1

Outline

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II. Patience Is Necessary for Victory

III. Patience Is Necessary for Tranquility

Conclusion

Introduction

Would you take God's Word and turn to James chapter 1. Now James is one of the most straightforward men in the entire Bible. He never minces words. If you want to know what James is thinking, then he'll be very happy to tell you. And of course, he tells you by divine inspiration. Tonight, Brother James is going to talk to us about patience, and I want to talk to you about the purpose and power of patience, or patience's perfect work.

James chapter 1 and verse 1: *"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;"*—that literally means, "various trials"—*"knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways"* (James 1:1–8).

Now that's James chapter 1. Turn to the last chapter of James now—James chapter 5. James begins this work on testing and trial by talking about patience, and he ends it talking about patience. Now I begin in James chapter 5 and verse 7: *"Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord."* Now we sung tonight about the coming of the Lord, but he says, *"Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman"*—that means, "the farmer"—*"waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient. stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."*

Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door. Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord;”—that is, the fulfillment of what God is going to do—“*that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy*” (James 5:7–11). Well, what a wonderful, wonderful scripture! If we didn’t do anything else but just read the Scripture on patience, how it seems to move our hearts and speak to us!

I really believe, if you don’t learn patience, you probably will learn very little of anything else. If you don’t learn patience, you probably will not learn much of anything else. For example, you certainly wouldn’t learn to play the piano without patience, could you? You won’t believe this, Brother Jim; but there was a time when I took violin lessons. And there was a time when my teacher took me and shook me by the shoulders. Now I didn’t have patience, and I caused her to lose patience. You can’t learn to play the violin or the piano without patience. You can’t learn Greek without a certain amount of patience to do those Greek verbs. Anything worth learning, really, it seems to talk of patience.

Now patience—when we use the word *patience*—we kind of think of the idea, to do tedious things—and that’s involved. But actually, the Bible word *patience*, and the word that I’m using here from the Book of James, means “to be able to bear up under great pressure.” “To bear up under great pressure”—that’s what the Greek word means—“to bear up under.” Literally, it means, “to endure.” And it just might be better, rather than translating it *patience*, if we translated it *endurance*.

I picked this little thing up, and I read it. And it blessed me so much that I just thought I would read it to you, because many of you think that one of these days you’re going to come to some great trial in life, and then, you’re going to have to have patience. But listen to this. Most of us dream of becoming rich, or famous, or doing great things for the Lord. We thought life would be meaningful and exciting, but instead, our lives are routine. Our daily work seems of no consequence or, even worse, we’re unemployed, ill, or aged. Others do exciting things and tell of their successes, while day by day by day, we seem to go unnoticed. But God knows. He saw the poor woman throw two coins in the collection plate. He knew that Moses was tending sheep for 40 years. Jesus often used the services of ordinary people on His way to do great things: the boy with his five loaves and his two fish, Mary and her perfume, Simon to carry the cross. Jesus knows about the car that broke down, the poor marks at school, the bad temper of the boss, the constant headache, the dull job, the stubborn children, and the ailing relative. If it concerns you, then it concerns Christ. Isn’t that beautiful? If it

concerns you, then it concerns Christ.

Why? Because we're a part of Him. We're members of His Body. First Corinthians 12, verse 18, says: *"But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him"* (1 Corinthians 12:18). It has pleased God to put you where you are. He is watching to see if you are faithful in the monotony as well as in trouble, or persecution, or prosperity. Now it's one thing to be faithful in trouble. It's another thing to be faithful in persecution. It's one thing to be faithful in prosperity. Hey folks, it's something else to be faithful in monotony, huh? In monotony—I mean, in the same old life. God calls most of us to do only the ordinary, and sometimes, the menial tasks of life. We probably cannot see His purposes, but we must not refuse to meet the needs that He puts before us. Do not despise the day of small things. We may not see the effects of our efforts, but we can leave the outcome to God. When Peter asked what would happen to John, Jesus told him that it was not Peter's problem. Jesus told him, "Follow Me" (John 21:22). And that is our task—to follow Jesus.

Now here is the beautiful part—listen to this. It takes more grace to care for a handicapped person than for a famous preacher. Don't worry—just follow Jesus. It is harder to tithe if you're poor than if you're a millionaire. Don't fret—just follow Jesus. You recall that it was the servant with only one talent that did not use it. God does not give us a quota to fill, but He does ask us to be faithful. You see, what most of us need is endurance. What most of us need—I'm not just talking about those people who are in the big things and the dramatic things, but I'm talking about people who are in the routine, the day-by-day things. And when you talk about the big, and the dramatic, and the routine, and everything in-between, I think that just about includes all of us, doesn't it? And every one of us is to be faithful.

Now most of us get antsy. One man said, "My problem is that I'm in a hurry, and God isn't." Somebody wrote:

This is the age of the half-read page,
the quick hash and the mad dash.
the bright night with the nerves tight,
the plane hop with the brief stop,
the lamp tan in a short span,
the brain strain and the heart pain,
the catnaps till the spring snaps,
and the fun is done.

Ha, that's the way we live. Many of us ought to just pray, "Lord, give me patience." Now James, here, talks about patience doing her perfect work. Now I want to talk to you about patience's perfect work. I want to talk to you about three things patience will do

for you, and really, in the course of this, how to have this patience.

I. Patience Is Necessary for Maturity

First of all, patience is necessary for maturity. Patience is necessary for maturity. Look, if you will, in verse 2: *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations”* (James 1:2). Now the word for *temptations* here means “trials.” It means “testings.”

Now the word *temptation*, in the Book of James, is used in two senses. And I want to tell you this, because if I don’t tell you this, then you’ll get hopelessly confused in James. Sometimes, the word *temptation* means “a trial” or “a testing.” Sometimes, it means “an inducement to do evil.” For example, in verse 2, he says, *“Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.”* But look in verse 13: *“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man”* (James 1:13). Well, that seems almost contradictory if you don’t understand that the word *temptation* here is used in two senses. There’s the temptation which is a test from God, and there’s the temptation which is an inducement to evil that comes from the devil. The temptation that comes from the devil—the temptation to sin—is sent by the devil to cause us to stumble. The temptations—the trials—of life are sent by God to cause us to stand. The devil wants us to sin, so that we might stumble. God wants us to overcome, that we might stand.

Now these trials are there. God sends trials—this kind of testing—for one purpose. God allows us to have trouble. As a matter of fact, God manufactures trouble for us, isn’t that beautiful? God manufactures trouble for us. I mean, God says, “Just rejoice when it comes, because I have a purpose in it.” Trials are going to come. Notice, in verse 2: *“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations”* (James 1:2)—not *if*, but *when*. Everybody here is in one of three categories: you’re just getting out of trouble, you’re in trouble, or you’re just fixing to get into trouble. I mean, just count it all joy when you fall into divers temptation. These trials produce the patience that we need. See, look in verse 3: *“Knowing this, that the trying”—the testing—“of your faith worketh patience”* (James 1:3).

Now you know what you’re asking for when you ask for patience? Let me show you another verse. Just keep your finger there, and turn back to Romans chapter 5, and verse 3. That makes it even more plain. When you pray for patience, let me just show you what you’re really praying for: *“And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience”* (Romans 5:3). That’s what tribulation does for you—it gives you patience. So when you’re saying, “Lord, give me patience,” you’re saying, “Lord, send me tribulation.” Well, you say, “Well, then I don’t think I’ll pray for it.” Well, listen, friend. God has a wonderful plan for your heart and for your life.

Go back again to James chapter 1 and verse 3: “*Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.*” Now when you pray for patience, you can expect trials. But now, remember this about trials: Trials work for you, not against you. Count it all joy when they come. Trials, to the Christian, are not obstacles; they’re opportunities. And they are there for our maturity, for our completion. Now look at it again—verse 4: “*But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect*” (James 1:4).

Now when the Bible says that you may be perfect, the Bible does not mean that you may be sinless. No one can live above sin unless they have a room over a pool hall. That isn’t what he means when he says, “Be perfect.” The word *perfect* means “mature.” Now I say, “That is a perfect flower.” I don’t mean, “That’s a sinless flower.” I mean, “That’s a perfect flower.” We look at a baby and say, “Well, that’s a perfect baby”—perfectly-formed. Sin is not—that’s not—what James is talking about. He’s not saying that you may be sinless. He’s saying that you may be mature.

Now one of the perfect works of patience is maturity. God wants to bring you to maturity. For example, an oak is the perfection of an acorn—an oak tree, if that’s a mature acorn. “When you are discouraged, and feeling a little blue, take a look at a mighty oak, and see what a nut can do.” You see, an oak tree is the perfection of an acorn. Now what God is saying is this: “You have faith, but I’m going to mature that faith.” And the only way—listen—the only way that your faith can be mature is by endurance; it matures under stress.

Now our muscles grow by lifting weights, and some of you work out—and I do a little bit, but not nearly as much as I ought—but almost anybody who has been around a gymnasium or had anything to do with athletics knows that there’s almost a cliché: “No pain, no strain, no gain,” right? I mean, God doesn’t want you to be a spiritual cream puff. Now a lot of you are flabby spiritually. I won’t mention the other part, but just flabby spiritually—and we are. We live weakly, and we die sadly, because we do not respond to the trials that God gives us. And when trials come, we just want to have the trials removed, rather than understanding that James says, “Count it all joy when you fall into divers trials” (James 1:2).

I believe I told you a story before of a man that was a student of insects and a biologist. He found a cocoon of an emperor moth, and he kept it. And he wanted to watch that emperor moth come out of the cocoon. And he saw the cocoon as it began to split, and that beautiful gorgeous moth, as it begin to emerge, the moth was just straining, and straining, and straining, trying to rip that cocoon—to come out of that cocoon. And the man thought he would help the moth, and he took a sharp razor, and he slit the cocoon. And he helped the moth to emerge, and the moth just sort of flopped out, and flapped its wings feebly, and then fell, in exhaustion and death, to the ground.

Now that man thought he was doing that moth a favor; but, you see, God had built into that moth the need to exercise those wings, and to exercise itself, and to build that strength, before it ever came out of that cocoon. It was necessary. It was meant to gain strength by striving. Sometimes, we don't do people a favor, when we take away the trial.

Now most of us, when we have some sort of a trial, what do we do? What do we pray? "Lord, take it away," isn't that right? I mean, I want to be honest. That's what I pray most of the time: "Lord, just take it away. Lord, I don't want it." But you know what we ought to pray? Look, here's what James says we ought to do. In verse 4, he says, "*Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not;*"—that means He doesn't scold you—"and it shall be given Him" (James 1:4–5).

What you do when you have a trial is to pray for wisdom; that's what you do—pray for wisdom. Find out what God wants to do in this thing. First of all, rejoice; and then, just simply pray for wisdom. We ought to say, "Lord, give me wisdom, so I'll not fail this test."

You see, the word *trial* and the word *test* are related. Now if God gives you a test, and you skip the test, then He's going to give it to you again. He doesn't stop giving the test. He just keeps on every time you fail, and He gives you the test again. So why don't you just study for the test? Why don't you just say, "Lord, give me wisdom, so I'll know how to pass this test. What is it that You're trying to build in me? What proclivity—what spiritual ability—do You want to build in me?" So what is the purpose of patience? What is patience's perfect work? Number one: maturity—that you may be perfect, entire, wanting nothing. God doesn't want you to be a spiritual cream puff.

II. Patience Is Necessary for Victory

Second purpose of patience: not only maturity, but also victory—victory. Let's continue to read here. Look, if you will, in chapter 1 and verse 12: "*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him*" (James 1:12). Now don't get the idea that the crown of life is something that we get when we meet Jesus—that He says, "Well done, now, good and faithful servant," and He puts a crown on our head. There are crowns that are going to be crowns of rewards, but that's not what the crown of life is. The crown of life is what you have now. What he's saying is that you may be able to live as a king—that you may be able to live victoriously right now. He's not talking about a future crown, but victory, right now.

If you have your Bibles, and don't mind marking in them, then mark in the margin Romans chapter 5 and verse 17—and here's what the Scripture says: *"For if by one man's offence death reigned by one,"*—that is, death ruled—*"much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ"* (Romans 5:17). He's not talking about reigning in the sweet by-and-by, but He's talking about reigning in the nasty now-and-now—right now, to reign in life, to have a crown of life, and to be a victor. Listen, folks. There can be no victory without endurance. If you don't bear the cross, then you can't wear the crown. There are no cheap victories.

Now God wants us to have victory, all right, but, you know, most of us—we don't want the kind of victory that comes with endurance. We just sort of want a "name it and claim it and forget all the rest of it," huh? Now listen. Turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 2, with me, for a moment, and let me show you something—2 Corinthians chapter 2. Isn't the Bible a wonderful book? Amen. Look in verse 14: *"Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ"* (2 Corinthians 2:14). Well, Paul never knew any defeat, huh? Yeah. *"Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph."* Well, it looks like every time Paul gets into something, he just wins. Boy, ole' Paul—he really had it easy, didn't he? Never knew any difficulty—never. It's just victory all the way—all honey and no bees?

All right now, wait a minute. That's fine, and that is true. Paul knew what victory was all the time, but now, just turn a few chapters to chapter 4 and look with me in verse 8. The same Paul says this: *"We are troubled on every side"* (2 Corinthians 4:8). Did you know that about Paul? Do you think you've got troubles? You say, "If I were right, then I wouldn't have all of these troubles." Was Paul right with God? I believe he was. *"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body."* That's what we're talking about: reigning in life that the life of the Lord Jesus may be made manifest in our body—for what? *"For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh"* (2 Corinthians 4:8–11). Would you like the life of Jesus to be made manifest in you? Paul said these things happened to him, that Jesus would be made manifest in him, and that he would always triumph in Christ Jesus.

I'm telling you friend, that Paul knew what he was to endure. And if you don't bear the cross, then you can't wear the crown. Yes, victory is our gift. Yes, God wants us to have victory. But I'm telling you that endurance is necessary for maturity, and endurance is necessary for victory. Now there are a lot of you who are vulnerable to

every attack of the Enemy, because you don't have this one quality of endurance. The Bible says, in Proverbs chapter 25 and verse 28: *"He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls"* (Proverbs 25:28). There are some folks like that here tonight. You're like a city broken down without walls. Anytime the devil wants to come against you, he just walks right in. I mean, there are no gates; there are no bars; and there are no doors. You are open season for the devil, because you don't have a rule over your own spirit. There is no discipline. There's no life of Christ. There is no victory there, and the lack of patience is causing many of us to be victims rather than victors. And God help us that we might learn to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, if we would wear the crown.

III. Patience Is Necessary for Tranquility

Now endurance—endurance. Patience is necessary for maturity. Patience is necessary for victory. One third and final thing—a third component of patience's perfect work—patience is also necessary for tranquility. Maturity, victory, and tranquility.

Now if you know maturity, and if you know victory, then you're going to know peace, and you're going to know tranquility. Go back now to James chapter 5, with me, for a moment, and look beginning in verse 7—now watch it: *"Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned."*—that is, don't get the mule lip—*"behold, the judge standeth before the door. Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience."* Now watch verse 11: *"Behold, we count them happy which endure"* (James 5:7–11). It's necessary for tranquility. *"Behold, we count them happy which endure."*

Now what Paul is talking about here is what we call *the law of the harvest*. He talks about the husbandman who is waiting for the harvest. Notice verse 7: "The husbandman waits for the precious fruit of the earth." Now you know the law of the harvest. We reap what we sow, we reap more than we sow, and we reap later than we sow.

When I was a little boy, we had a victory garden. That was back in World War II. And I was a little boy, but I was alive at that time. My daddy was in the service, and so, to help things out, we planted a garden in the backyard. That's my whole experience in farming. About the only thing I could grow was radishes, but I didn't grow them too well, because I kept pulling them up, and then putting them back in the ground. I wanted to see what progress my radishes were making, and you can't do it that way.

Now notice—notice what he says here in verse 7. He talks about the early and the latter rains. Look: “The farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he received the early and the latter rain.” Now it was the early rain that came in the fall that caused the seed to germinate. But it was the latter rain that came in the spring that would cause the grain to swell, and grow, and be ready to harvest.

Now what’s James saying? James is saying what any farmer needs to know: It takes patience to be a farmer. It takes endurance. You’ve got to put the seed in the ground, and you’ve got to wait for it. There is no instant harvest—no instant harvest. Galatians chapter 6 and verse 9, says, *“In due season we shall reap, if we faint not”* (Galatians 6:9). Now the problem with us is we want it now, huh? It’s like that woman who prayed, “Lord, give me patience—right now.” Our forefathers—if they missed a stagecoach, then they said, “Well, they’ll be another one along in a couple of months.” We get excited if we miss a section in a revolving door. I mean, we want it now, now— instant gratification. Put in a nickel, or a quarter, or 75 cents in and you get something out of the vending machine, I mean, right away.

I heard about a guy who wanted a cup of coffee, and he put in his 75 cents. And he pushed the thing for sugar, and he pushed the thing for cream. And he pushed the other button, and the thing started to whirl, and coffee started to come, and the cream started to come, and everything else started to come, but there was no cup—right down the drain. He said, “Boy, that really is automation. It even drinks it for you.

Now that’s the kind of that’s the kind of an age that we live in. Now you’re going to get in trouble—listen, folks—you’re going to get in trouble, if you try to hurry the harvest. You’re going to lose your peace, if you try to hurry the harvest.

Let me give you an illustration of this, and I’ll be finished. Abraham tried to hurry the harvest. Go back, for just a moment, to Genesis, chapter 16. Let me show you that—Genesis chapter 16. God promised Abraham a son whose name was to be Isaac, and he was the son of promise. Now Abraham just couldn’t wait on God. Notice in chapter 16: *“Now Sarai Abram’s wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar”* (Genesis 16:1).

And by the way, where did Abraham—Abram, his name was at this time—where did he get this Egyptian when he was down in Egypt? What was he doing down in Egypt? He was out of the will of God. He couldn’t wait on God, so then, he went down to Egypt. Abram brought two things out of Egypt. Do you know what he brought out? He brought out cattle. He didn’t have any cattle when he went down there; he just had sheep. He was a shepherd when he went down there, and he came out a herdsman. He came out a rancher, huh? He brought cattle out of Egypt. He got his cattle down there in Egypt,

and he brought Hagar out of Egypt. Now why did he have a range war? Because of his cattle. There was plenty for the sheep. There just wasn't enough for the cattle. That caused him trouble. Do you remember why the range war was fought? That was over his cattle, and now, he's got this Egyptian woman he got down there in Egypt. He got antsy, and he couldn't wait on God. He couldn't trust God, so he got these things down there. He got this woman, and he got this cattle.

Now her name is Hagar. *"And Sarai said to Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing"* (Genesis 16:2). Well, if God restrained her, then why didn't she wait? "The Lord," she said, "the Lord has just put a stop on it," so she's not going to let God slow her down. *"I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai"* (Genesis 16:2).

Now what she says is this: "I want children, and I want them now. You take my maid as your concubine and see if you can father a child by her." And Abram said he would do it. Notice verse 3: *"And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife"* (Genesis 16:3). Now that was legal in this day. It wasn't right, and it wasn't moral. There are a lot of things that are legal that are not moral. This was legal in this day, and Abram did that. He took his wife's maid. And notice in verse 4 how God let them have their own way. Now notice verse 4: *"And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes"* (Genesis 16:4).

Now notice what happens: God lets them have their own way. And when they get what they want, they don't want what they get. One of the most telling statements that I've heard in a long time is what George McDonald had to say. He said this: "In whatever a man does without God he must fail miserably or succeed even more miserably." May I say that again? "In whatever a man does without God he must fail miserably or succeed even more miserably." They had success. They had a baby. Did you know that God's greatest judgment, when we get antsy and don't wait on God, is to let us have our own way. And when we get what we want, we don't want what we get?

I heard about a little boy named Johnny who loved pancakes. He was greedy at the table—eating pancakes and always wanting more. One day, his mother said, "I believe I'll give him all he can eat." She sat him down, and fixed the batter, and said, "Johnny, have some more pancakes." He ate them. "Have some more pancakes." He ate them. "Have some more pancakes." He ate them. After a while, he wasn't asking for anymore. She said, "Johnny, don't you want some more pancakes?" He said, "No ma'am." He said, "I don't even want the ones I've had now." When we get what we want, we don't want what we get.

And so now, she begins to blame others. Look in verse 5 of this same chapter: *“And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong be upon thee: I have given my maid into my bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the LORD judge between me and thee”* (Genesis 16:5). Now she’s blaming others. And in verse 15—skip on down—Ishmael is born: *“And Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his son’s name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael”* (Genesis 16:15). He tried to hurry the harvest, and there’s been nothing but trouble ever since, and no peace—no peace—for the sons of Abraham. I’m telling you, dear friend, that endurance brings tranquility.

Go back again to James, and look at it. Look at the Scripture. Oh, how plain it is here in James, chapter 5. You have your own Bible. Just underscore it, and make it plain. Look, if you will, in verse 11: *“Behold, we count them happy”*—blessed, tranquil—*“which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job”* (James 5:11).

Conclusion

Friend, if you will learn, and not dodge this matter of endurance and patience, then you’re going to find out that you’re going to have the three things that most of us need tomorrow morning. You’re going to have maturity. You’re going to have victory. You’re going to have tranquility. Are you listening to your pastor? You can save a lot of time by waiting on God. You can save a lot of time waiting on God. You see, in the life you’ve got, you have to learn this: that there are some things you cannot control. You know, you can’t control most things. You can’t control people. I wish I could, boy. You can’t control people. You can’t control the weather. You can’t control airplanes and other things. And what you can’t control, you just learn to endure. The Apostle Paul said: *“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content”* (Philippians 4:11)—just to be content and to wait on God. Let’s bow our heads in prayer.

How to Pass the Tests of Life

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: June 4, 1978

Main Scripture Text: James 1:1–4

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.”

JAMES 1:2–3

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Introduction

Turn to James chapter 1. We are beginning a new study now through the book of James: “Practical Christianity: Religion in Shoe Leather.” And we’re going to preach right on through the book of James, God willing, Sunday mornings and Sunday nights. So if you don’t come Sunday nights, you’re just going to get half of it. How’s that? You say, “Fine.” No, don’t say that. You just come on Sunday nights. And I know there are some of you who cannot come, but we have the radio program for those of you who cannot come on Sunday nights.

Today we're talking on this subject: "How to Pass the Tests of Life." And I'm reading the first four verses of the book of James: "*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;*"—now this word *temptations* means "tests" or "trials"—"*knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*" (James 1:1–4) "How to Pass the Tests of Life."

¶ I heard of a young man who had taken his test at college and he'd made a zero. He went in to see the professor and he argued with the professor. He said, "Professor, I don't think I deserved this zero." And the professor said, "Neither do I, son, but it was the lowest grade I had." ¶

Now maybe you are failing just that miserably in the test of life. But God does have some tests, some examinations, and we're going to have to learn how to make a passing grade. And I hope some of us today will learn how to make an *A++*.

I. The Fact of Temptation

Several things I want you to learn about the tests of life. Now, remember here, when we're talking about testing, that the word *testing* and the word *temptation* are used interchangeably. And we'll see that even more as we go on. But, first of all, I want you to notice the fact of temptation. Notice in verse 1: "*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.*" (James 1:1) Just note that word *scattered*. And here God is talking to people who have endured persecution. They were being hounded and hunted, and they were wandering about as vagabonds on the earth.

Now when James says, "*...to the twelve tribes,*" he's not talking literally; he's talking figuratively. He is comparing the New Testament saints to the Old Testament saints. He is comparing the church to Israel and Judah. And just as Israel and Judah had been dispersed, they'd been torn away from their friends and from their country. And just as Israel and Judah had suffered indignities of a conquered people, starving and friendless under the heel of a cruel oppressor, he is using that as an example and as a figure of speech to describe and delineate the church. So the book of James is really a book that is written to Christians everywhere. When he says, "*...to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad,*" he's just speaking to Christians everywhere.

Folks, he's speaking to you. This is a letter to you. I hope you'll read your mail today. This is to the Christians wherever they may be, who suffer trials and temptations and tribulation. This is God's Word to you. And you say, "Well, I'm not scattered abroad." Well, you ought to be. This world is not our home; we're just passing through. And if you're building a nest, I believe God

will probably put a thorn in it. He doesn't want you to settle down here. All of God's children are going to feel what some of God's children feel.

And then I want you to notice he says in verse 2, "*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.*" (James 1:2) Notice he doesn't say, "*If you fall into divers temptations.*" It's not an *if*; it's a *when*. And if you're a Christian or if you're not a Christian, if you're saved or if you're lost, I can tell you one thing you can expect in life: difficulty. How did you like that? Just difficulty.

I don't care who you are: There are going to be trials. There will be oppression. There will be misunderstanding. There will be rejection. And it makes no difference if you're a Christian. Christianity will not make you immune. All people fall into diverse trials and temptations, Christians included. And he says *when*; he does not say *if*, in verse 2. And if I were to stand up here and tell you that all of your life when you become a Christian is going to be rose petals and sunlight, and that you're not going to have any troubles or any difficulties, I would be speaking from a closed Bible and from an empty head. But I want to tell you that persecution and trial and testing is a part of life. It is unavoidable. It is universal. It is inevitable.

II. The Forms of Temptation

And so, point number one, verses 1 and 2: the fact of temptation. Point number two: the forms of temptation. Notice verse 2: "*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.*" (James 1:2) Now the word *divers* means "various kinds, sundry, miscellaneous" temptations. My trials and my testings may not be like yours, and yours may not be like mine—because they are many, and they are varied. But they come in two categories—two categories.

A. Testing Our Faith

This word *testing* and *trials* may mean just simply a test like you test an automobile, or you test an airplane, or you test a new medicine. It's used in the book of 1 Peter, where the Bible says, "*Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.*" (1 Peter 4:12) It's used to describe how fire will test metal to prove whether it's pure or whether it's an alloy. And so that's one kind of testing. This kind of testing is sent by God to cause you to stand.

B. Temptation by the Devil

But there's another kind of temptation, another kind of testing—and that's sent by the devil. And the word *temptation* not only is used in the sense of a trial or a test; it's also used as a solicitation to evil, as a tempting to sin. Now this is not sent by God: "God tempts no man with evil; neither can He be tempted with evil." (James 1:13) This is sent by the devil. And the difference between the two is this: Trials are sent by God to cause us to stand; temptation to

sin is sent by the devil to cause us to stumble. One is meant for our maturity; the other is meant for our misery. But you're going to learn something now. James uses this word interchangeably. And when he says "*temptations*," it can mean either, as we're going to see. It can mean either, because, you see, while God does not cause both kinds, God allows both kinds, and God will use both kinds. Whether or not it is a testing of our faith or a tempting to sin, God uses both. These are the forms of temptation. And you're going to face them. And I face them. We all face them.

III. The Force of Temptation

Now, the third thing I want you to notice is the force of these temptations—the force of these temptations. Notice again in verse 2: "*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.*" (James 1:2) Now, just look at the phrase "*fall into*." That's the way temptations come. This phrase "*fall into*" is from a Greek word that is used as translated in the Gospels. Do you remember the story of the man who was going from Jerusalem to Jericho and he *fell* among thieves? Same word. He *fell* among thieves. It's the same word, *peripipto*, which means "to fall into suddenly." Here's a man just going along; he feels fine—high, wide, and handsome—and suddenly, just like that, he's in trouble.

You see, some of you are not paying a lot of attention right now, because you're saying, "Well, Preacher, you're preaching to all of those folks who've got troubles; I ain't got none. Living fine today, everything's fine—blood pressure's down, bank account's up—everything is fine!" Well, for the next fifteen minutes, maybe. See, you don't know what the next phone call is going to bring, do you? You don't know what you're going to meet when you turn the next corner. You just don't know.

And it may seem fine right now, but what the Lord is saying when He talks about falling into diverse temptations is that when they come, they may come savage; they may be serious; they may be sudden. And you don't know and I don't know when they are coming. That's the sense of the word "*fall into divers temptations*," just like the man who fell among thieves. Who knows what you're going to fall among this afternoon? See, you don't know. I don't know. We're just talking now about the force—the force of temptation.

Winston Churchill was speaking to the House of Commons, and he gave this advice. He said, "We must always be ready to meet at our average moment anything that any possible enemy could hurl against us at his selected moment." Are you ready at your average moment to meet what the devil will throw at you at his selected moment? Are you? I mean, right now, are you ready? Are you ready if the devil this afternoon were to hurl against you some great force, some trial, some testing, some temptation? The force of temptation, it comes suddenly, swiftly, surely, savagely. All right, that's the third thing that we need to learn, and learn it well.

I want to say again that temptation is not going to be removed by conversion, or it's not going to be lessened by consecration. Sometimes we have the idea, "Well, if I get saved, I won't face those old temptations anymore." Who are you kidding? You think, "Well, if I get saved, I won't have any more problems." My, my, where did you learn that? Not from the Bible. They're going to come. And you say, "Well then, I don't think I'll get saved then." They're still going to come. "Man that is born of woman" (Job 14:1)—it doesn't matter whether you're saved or whether you're not. There's just a difference in what the Christian has to do with his problems that the unsaved person doesn't have to do with his.

IV. The Facing of Temptation

So, let's go on with the next point: not only the force of temptation, but the facing of temptation—the facing of temptation. Notice in verse 3: "*Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.*" (James 1:3) And so, when temptation comes, it's just like taking a test; it is the testing of your faith.

Now then, boys and girls who just got out of school this spring, they had to face their final examinations—and I hope they were prepared. I hope you are prepared. I hope that you're doing your homework now, so when the examination comes, you'll know how to face it and not flunk it—the facing of temptation. You see, it is not God's will that you have the vacancy of temptation but that you have victory in temptation.

A. Temptation Is Not Sin

Now, having said that, let me say this, and I want you to pay close attention. As you face your temptations—whether they be the trials and the vicissitudes of life, or whether they be the solicitation to do sin and to do evil—when you face the temptation, remember this lesson: It is not a sin to be tempted. Now, get that in your heart, and get it down good. It is not a sin to be tempted. You say, "I had a temptation to steal something: I must have been a sinner." No, you weren't. You say, "I had a temptation to tell somebody off: I must be awful." Not necessarily. You say, "I had a temptation to commit adultery: Wasn't that a sin?" No, it was not a sin.

Temptation to sin is not a sin. If it is a sin, then Jesus is a sinner, for the Bible says Jesus was tempted "in all points like as we are, yet without sin." Do you want the scripture for that? Hebrews 4, verse 15: "*For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*" (Hebrews 4:15) Jesus felt what you feel. Jesus was human. He was just as much a man as though He were not God at all. He had humanness about Him.

I'm not saying Jesus wasn't God, for He was as much God as though he were not man at all. He wasn't some sort of a phantom, however, half God and half man, some sort of a freak—no, no. He was the God-man: as much God as though not man at all, as much man as though not

God at all. But He faced in His manhood and in His humanity the temptations that you face. And He is touched. He can sympathize with you, for He knows what you feel. He knows what you face. He knows! And if being tempted is a sin and Jesus was tempted, that means Jesus was a sinner. But I want to tell you, bless God, He never sinned, though He knew those temptations.

B. Testing Is Not Because of Your Sin

And, secondly, I want to say to you, friend, that testings and trials and tribulations are not necessarily because of your sin. Sometimes something bad will happen to you, and you say, “Oh me! What did I do? What did I do? I must have done something terrible. I wouldn’t have lost my job”; “I wouldn’t have had to go to the hospital”; or “What did I do? Why these trials?” And then we go through what we call “morbid introspection.” We take ourselves apart by little pieces, and we examine ourselves, and we put ourselves back together, trying to figure out what we did. It may be that you have done absolutely nothing wrong, but God is just simply testing your faith.

And, you see, if we don’t understand this, we may get discouraged, because *the seeds of doubt and discouragement sprout in the soil of ignorance*. Jesus was tested and tempted and tried in all points like as we are, and yet without sin. So as you face your temptation, I want you to face it with a wholesome attitude. It doesn’t mean that you have done something wrong, or that you are doing something wrong, if you’re tempted.

C. How to Face Temptation

Now, how are you going to face your temptation? Well, I want you just to put your bookmark there in James chapter 1 and turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 10, please. Now here is another key verse that deals with temptation, or testing, or trials, as the case may be. First Corinthians chapter 10, verse 13—look at it: *“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”* (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Now we’re still talking about the facing of your temptation. Now I want you to notice; you take your pen, if you’d like, and circle the word *but*. It’s used three times in that verse; three times God uses the word *but*. And it’s almost as though we’re arguing with the teacher. We come to the teacher, and the teacher has given us a hard test, and we begin to argue with the teacher. And we begin to tell the teacher, “It wasn’t my fault that I didn’t pass the test.” And we tend to blame the teacher as though to say, “If you had given better questions, or if you had taught me a little more, or if you had only told what was expected on this test, maybe I would have passed this test rather than failing it.”

And if you notice that generally, in school, when we argue with the teacher that way, we don't win. You know, it's just they don't change the grades any more than referees seem to change the calls. Well, I want to tell you, when you argue with the Lord and say, "Now, Lord, it's your fault I didn't pass this test," the Lord's going to give you three *buts*—three arguments, three rebuttals—and these three rebuttals are going to come because of your three arguments.

1. Your Temptation Is Not Unique

The first argument you're going to bring to the Lord is you're going to say, "Well, my temptation was unique. Nobody else ever went through what I'm going through. Nobody else has ever felt what I feel. But I want you to notice what God says in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 13: *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man"* (1 Corinthians 10:13)—*"but such as is common to man."* And there's the first *but*: "No temptation, *but* such as is common to man." You are not unique, and your temptation is no different from what other people feel.

2. Your Temptation Is Not Too Strong

All right, first argument goes down the drain. You say, "Yes, Teacher, but there's another reason I flunked the test. The temptation, though it was common, was too strong. Other people may have felt the same thing, but not with the same intensity. Oh, I couldn't fight it; it was bigger than both of us. It just came in and it just overwhelmed me. And I just was not able to do anything about it." And the Teacher says, "Well, you should have passed the test." And He uses the second *but*: *"But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able."* (1 Corinthians 10:13)

You see, it is God who controls the temptation. And God is not going to allow more to come to you than you're able to bear. Now, listen to me. Nothing comes to you but what it comes through God. God allows it even if the devil sends it. God allows it, and the Bible says, *"He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust."* (Psalms 103:14)

† A manufacturer manufactures a truck, and he knows the frame of that truck, the chassis of that truck, and so he says, "This is a one-ton truck," or "a ton-and-a-half truck," or "a two-ton truck." That means, "I manufacture the truck. I know the frame of the truck. I know the load the truck can carry." †

God knows your frame, and He knows the load that you can carry. *"God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able."* (1 Corinthians 10:13) And even what Satan does, he can only do as God allows it. And so, don't you say that your temptation was so strong that you could not overcome it.

3. Your Temptation Is Not Impossible

You come up with a third argument. You say, “Yes, teacher, but the reason I flunked my test is there was no way to pass it. It was just an impossible test.” And the Lord gives the third *but*: “...but will with the temptation make a way to escape.” (1 Corinthians 10:13) There is a way. There is a way! You’d better find it. It will be God’s way. It will not be in your strength. It is God who makes a way. No wonder you fail if you try to do it by yourself.

But I want to tell you, ladies and gentlemen, that God’s plan for you is to face the trials of life. God’s plan for me is to face the temptations of life, not to make excuses, for God is faithful and God is there. And so we are to face the temptation.

D. The Fruits of Temptation

Now, the last thing I want you to notice: the fruits of temptation. Why does God allow it? You see, if God could stop it, why doesn’t He? Well, I’ll tell you. God *is* trying to do something. God *is* working something in our lives. Look in verse 3: “*Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*” (James 1:3–4) You see, everything that God does and everything that God allows is for a reason: It is for your good and for His glory.

Here the Lord mentions the four fruits of your temptations. You want to say, “Why am I going through this? Why do I face this? Why has this calamity come to me?” Four reasons.

1. Enjoyment

The first one is a wonderful one: for your enjoyment. You say, “You mean I’m supposed to enjoy this?” Well, let’s go back into the Word. Look in verse 2: “*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.*” (James 1:2) Now I didn’t say that. James said it through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. “*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.*” Now we sometimes get very stoical, and we say, “Well, what can’t be cured must be endured.” But God says, “What can’t be cured can be enjoyed.” You begin to praise the Lord because you know God is getting ready to send you a blessing. I want to tell you what temptations rightly used are, and what testings and trials rightly used are: They are but the prelude to a great big blessing.

Now, understand that. They are just a harbinger of a blessing. God is getting ready to bless you in a wonderful, wonderful way. And so you’re going through trouble today. Say, “*Hot-diggity-dog! Wonderful!*” “*Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.*”

2. Endurance

“Well,” you say, “it doesn’t make sense to me.” Well, let’s go on and see why God says, “*Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.*” (James 1:2) But remember, the first fruit is enjoyment. The second fruit of this temptation is endurance—endurance. You see, the Lord

wants to teach you how to endure, and so we read here in verse 3, “*Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.*” (James 1:3) Now this word *patience* is *hupomone*, and it means “to bear up under” or “to endure” or “to be steadfast.” It doesn’t mean the kind of patience we sometimes mean when we say, “Lord, help me to have patience with my children,” or “With my husband, I want to wipe his feet off when he comes in out of the garden,” or “Give me the patience to thread this needle.” That’s not what He’s talking about. It’s a much stronger word than that. And it does not just mean being calm in a jittery situation. But it means the ability to bear up under the testing. And the trying of your faith worketh steadfastness; it worketh endurance.

Say, have you ever said, “Boy, I just don’t pray like I ought to pray; it’s always on again and off again”? Have you ever said, “You know, I just don’t witness like I ought to; I make a good start, and then I fail”? Have you ever said, “Boy, I wish I were more consistent; I wish I were more steadfast”? Okay, God is going to send you to school. Do you know what He’s going to do? He’s going to give you some tests, some trials, some temptations. And the reason that those things will come will be to make you endure, to keep you from being on again, off again—on again, off again. Endurance—endurance. The first fruit: enjoyment. The second fruit: endurance. You see, it’s that constant pressure that keeps us close to God.

† A man had a grandfather clock, and he felt sorry for the grandfather clock because it had a weight on it. And that weight there in the box was always pulling. The man said, “Oh, Clock, you’ve held this weight so long: I’m going to remove it and let you rest.” And he took it off. And the grandfather clock said, “Don’t take that weight from me. That’s what keeps me going.” †

Now I want to tell you, dear friend, the trials and the tests of life are there for your endurance: to keep you going, to keep you trusting, to keep you praying, to keep you reading up on God. You know, one of the big problems with the astronauts in outer space is weightlessness—weightlessness. God doesn’t want you to be raised in a vacuum of weightlessness.

3. Enlargement

And so, the first fruit is enjoyment. The second fruit is endurance. The third fruit is enlargement. I want you to notice as James goes on to say, “*Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect.*” (James 1:3–4) Now the Greek word here is *teleios*. And it doesn’t mean “sinless.” There’s a difference between *perfection* and *sinless*. Now we look at one of these roses over here and they are beautiful. We don’t say, “That’s a sinless rose.” We say, “That’s a perfect rose”—“a perfect rose.” And, you see, the word *perfect* doesn’t mean “sinless.” God is not working to

make you sinless. You won't be sinless until you get to heaven. But God is sending testings and trials into your life to make you mature, to make you perfect.

Let me give you another illustration of perfection. Have you ever said, "That's a perfect baby"? You don't mean that's a sinless baby. Or like this: "Jesus, the captain of our salvation, was made perfect through suffering." (Hebrews 2:10) That's what the Scripture says. Do you think it means that Jesus was made sinless through suffering? Friend, He has always been sinless. There was never a time when He wasn't sinless. No, you see, James is not talking here about sinlessness, but he's talking about enlargement; he's talking about growth; he's talking about maturity. That's what the word *teleios* means.

🌿 For example, an oak tree is the *teleios* of an acorn. It is the perfection of an acorn. You see, a mighty oak and a little acorn. So when you're feeling discouraged and feeling a little blue, take a look at a mighty oak and see what a nut can do. 🌿

See, that's what we're talking about—just coming to the maturity that God wants you to come to, and so you see God's plan. God says, "Enjoy it, because I have a plan." Listen to it. Trials and tribulations lead to endurance, and endurance leads to maturity. You see, that's what makes you strong. You grow when you work against pressure.

🌿 A man watched a butterfly one time trying to emerge from a cocoon. And he saw this beautiful butterfly trying to emerge, and he saw the cocoon as the transformation was taking place and the emergence. And this man, thinking that he would help, took his razor-sharp penknife and he slit the side of that silk cocoon, and the butterfly just sort of flopped out. And when it did, it lay there for a while, and feebly beat its wings a couple of times, and then fell to the ground, collapsed, and died, because, you see, God had a plan for that butterfly in that cocoon. It was meant to swell against that cocoon, and to swell against it, and to push and to push and to push until those muscles were developed so it could fly. 🌿

So many times we're saying, "O God, let me out of this thing," when God wants to keep you right in that thing until you grow, until you mature, until you're strong. God doesn't want you to live weakly and to die feebly, but He wants you to grow, and He wants you to be mature. He wants you to be *teleios*—perfect.

4. Enrichment

And so, what are the fruits of temptation? First of all, enjoyment. Why enjoyment? Because of endurance. Why endurance? Because of enlargement. And why enlargement? Because of enrichment. Look at it. Look: "*Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect*"—now, watch—"*and entire, wanting nothing.*" (James 1:3–4) How would you like to be there: "*wanting nothing*"? Enriched in everything.

You see, God has a plan. God's not working against you. If someone wants to make you rich, then you ought to say, "Wonderful!" That's the reason you count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations. Now if you flunk the test, it's terrible. But if you pass the test *summa cum laude*, I hope then you're going to just be enriched. God has a wonderful plan for you. Trials will not rob you; they will enrich you. And the idea is that you are to live a life with no inadequacies.

The songwriter put it this way:

*When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply:
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.*

—JOHN RIPPON

You see, the Lord wants to make you rich. He wants to bless you. You say, "There's a dark cloud over my head right now." Well, maybe that's better for you than the sunshine.

† William Cowper was another hymn writer, and William Cowper was so discouraged. He wasn't a Christian. He got so discouraged he believed that he would commit suicide. And so he tried many ways to commit suicide. It's almost humorous, though really there's nothing too funny about it. William Cowper decided he would kill himself with a gun. He got the gun and pointed it to his temple, and when he pulled the trigger, the gun wouldn't fire. And so Cowper decided that wasn't the way. He got a rope and tied himself to the chandelier and tried to hang himself. And the rope broke. Then William Cowper decided that he would take poison. And he took poison, and got well. He was getting more discouraged. He couldn't even kill himself.

He went down to the Thames River and he hired a carriage, at least to take him to the Thames. And he said, "Ride me to the Thames." It was not a taxi in that day, but a horse and buggy. And in the thick London fog—well, you know, anybody could find the Thames River—but this cabby couldn't. He drove around for an hour and a half, and finally brought William Cowper to his apartment, and said, "I can't find it." Cowper went upstairs so discouraged, till he found a Bible, and he began to read the Bible. And God spoke to him out of the Bible, and he was born again. And then he wrote that great hymn that we love to sing:

*God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.
Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread*

*Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.*

—WILLIAM COWPER ¶

Oh, the clouds that you so much dread are big with mercy. It looks like a dark cloud, doesn't it? But God wants to bless you. Some way, somehow, standing in the shadows you will find Jesus, I promise. But what really counts is that He promises.

Sometimes we tend not to take God at His word and count it all joy. Sometimes we complain, don't we? Sometimes, rather than being humbly grateful, we get grumbly hateful, and we just complain against the Lord.

¶ Another hymn writer, little Fanny Crosby, when just a child, only eight years of age, was blinded. You know, Fanny Crosby spent all of her life in blindness—at least most of her life. And as a child without sight, at the age of eight, little Fanny Crosby wrote this:

*Oh, what a happy soul am I!
Although I cannot see,
I am resolved that in this world
contented I shall be.*

*How many blessings I enjoy
that other people don't.
To weep and sigh because I'm blind,
I cannot—and I won't!*

—FANNY J. CROSBY

And she didn't. She just took her blessings and let God enrich her life and enliven her life. And in the test of life I give Fanny Crosby an A+. Wouldn't you? Oh, how many blessings! ¶

*Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!*

—FANNY J. CROSBY

Conclusion

And so, dear friend, the fact of temptations: They are universal—they are universal. The force of temptations: They come suddenly. The forms of temptation: It may be sent by God to cause you to stand. It may be sent by Satan to cause you to stumble. But God is over it all. The facing of temptations: God will make a way to escape. The fruits of temptations: your enjoyment, your endurance, your enlargement, your enrichment. God has a great plan for you today. Don't miss it. ¶

@ The seeds of doubt and discouragement sprout in the soil of ignorance., 7
"Professor, I don't think I deserved this zero.", 2
A truck manufacturer knows the load the truck can carry., 9
Fanny Crosby, blind from childhood, yet such a blessing!, 14
God had a plan for that butterfly in that cocoon., 12
Great despair leads to God for hymn writer William Cowper., 13
Take a look at a mighty oak and see what a nut can do., 11
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How to Pass the Tests of Life

By Adrian Rogers

Sermon Date: May 16, 1999

Main Scripture Text: James 1:1–4

Outline

Introduction

- I. Remember the Sure Fact of Trials
- II. Recognize the Special Forms of These Tests
- III. Respect the Savage Force of Temptation
- IV. Reap the Sweet Fruits of This Testing

Conclusion

Introduction

We're going to have a short Bible study tonight. And would you take God's holy Word and find James chapter 1. James is back toward the back of the New Testament. And what we're going to talk about tonight is how to pass the tests of life. Now, we all are tested in life. Sometimes, God is a strange teacher. He gives the test first, and then the lesson afterward. But we all face tests in life. Now, the Bible calls these, in James, these tests, temptations. Some Bibles translate it tests. Some Bibles translate it temptations. Some translate it trials. But, we're going to face in life heartaches, disappointments, tests of life, and we need to learn how to pass these tests.

Read with me James 1:1 through 4. "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting." Now, when James says this is written to the twelve tribes that are scattered abroad, he's talking now about spiritual Israel. He's making a play on words. Just as God's literal people, the Jews, were exiled and persecuted, the Christians of that day had been persecuted. They were scattered here and there by persecution. And so, he's making a play on words. And, really, he's talking to us. And he says, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations—that literally means various trials or tests—knowing this, that the trying, or the testing, of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

I. Remember the Sure Fact of Trials

Four things I want to lay on your heart tonight, and the very first of these I want you to remember: I want you to remember the sure fact of trials. You are going to have

trials. You're going to have difficulties. And there's no fine print in the contract. Now, he doesn't say "if." Notice, in verse 2, he doesn't say, "Count it all joy, if ye fall into divers temptations," but he says, "when." If you think that you're not going to have difficulties because you're a Christian, it's probably because you have an empty head, or else you have a closed Bible. And being saved is not going to make you immune to heartache and to temptation. They are universal, and they are inevitable.

II. Recognize the Special Forms of These Tests

Now, here's the second thing I want you to notice, and we're just going to rush right through this. Not only do I want you to remember the sure fact, but I want you to recognize the special forms of these tests. Now, look, if you will, in verse 2: "...count it all joy when you fall into divers—that is, various kinds of—temptation." Now, there are all kinds of difficulties, but they fall into two major groups.

First of all, this word trials can mean a test, like we are put through a test to see how we're going to respond to it. But the word temptation of trial can also mean an inducement to do evil. The test comes from God; the inducement to do evil comes from the devil. Go down to verse 13: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." So there are two kinds of tests that will come: one from God, which is a test to see our reaction; the other is a temptation from the devil, that is an inducement to do evil. The trials are sent by God to cause us to stand; the temptation to do evil is sent by the devil to cause us to stumble. God wants our maturity; Satan wants our misery. But whether the trial comes from God to cause us to stand, or whether it's an inducement to do evil that comes from the devil, God allows both of them. And so, don't think that you're going to be immune.

Put in your margin 1 Peter 4:12: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to test you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." Don't say, "How did this happen to me? I'm a child of God." And it will happen, and it can come from God at any moment. I'll give an illustration of this. The Bible says that God tempted Abraham when He told him to sacrifice Isaac. Well, He certainly didn't tempt Abraham to do bad; He tempted Abraham to do good. And that temptation was a test. He tested Abraham. He said, "Abraham, take your son, Isaac, and sacrifice him upon a mountain that I will show you." Of course, we know that that sacrifice never took place, because God was teaching Abraham the lesson of substitution, and he let a ram die in his son's stead, in Isaac's stead. But when God said to Abraham, "Abraham, take Isaac and sacrifice him," it wasn't Isaac that God wanted; it was Abraham. God was just simply saying, "Abraham, I want you to love Me with your whole heart."

III. Respect the Savage Force of Temptation

Now, here's the third thing I want you to see—and we're just moving through this because we've been here for a long time. I want you, thirdly, to respect the savage force of temptation. Look in verse 2: "...count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." This word fall is a word that literally has the idea of being pounced upon, to fall into something. It was used in the parable of the Good Samaritan about the man who fell among thieves. That means that the trial, the test, may come savagely. It may come suddenly. It may come seriously.

The other morning, the phone rang in our house—or at least when we woke up and got the messages. My mother had called early in the morning, and I thought, what does she want? Why would she call this early in the morning? Is my mother ill? Have one of my brothers or sisters been taken ill? I went to the phone and called her back. She just wanted to thank me for her birthday present. But you never know—you never know—what the next phone call is going to bring. We just fall into these things.

One of my heroes is Winston Churchill. And he said to the House of Commons something that has been very significant to me. He said, back in those treacherous days of World War II, "We must always be ready to meet, at our average moment—now, listen—we must always be ready, always ready, to meet, at our average moment, anything that any possible enemy might hurl at us, at his selected moment." Now, think about that: "We must always be ready, at our average moment, to meet anything that any possible enemy may hurl at us, at his selected moment." That means we don't know when things are going to come in the natural world or in the spiritual world. And conversion does not make you immune, and consecration does not lessen the force of it.

IV. Reap the Sweet Fruits of This Testing

Number four—number four: Dear friend, we must remember—reap the sweet fruits of this testing. God does not allow this testing without a purpose. He has a purpose in all of this. God is not trying to get us to be overcome, but God wants us to be mature. It—temptation—doesn't mean that we've done something wrong. Even if it's a temptation to sin, it doesn't mean we've done something wrong. Jesus was tempted in all points like as we are, and yet without sin. All hell was let loose on the Lord Jesus Christ, and it may be let loose on you.

Now, what are the fruits of this testing and this trial that may come to you? If you're going through a difficulty tonight, or one of your loved ones is going through a difficulty, let me just quickly mention, before we come to the conclusion of this program—because we've had a lot of extra things, and I am preaching perhaps the way you'd like for me to

do always, but just getting to the meat of the coconut—what are the fruits of this temptation? I want to mention four.

First of all, enjoyment. Now, that may sound strange, but notice what James says. Look in verse 2: “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various kinds of trials.” Now, when he says, “count it all joy,” he’s not just talking about grinning and bearing it. He’s talking about becoming an overcoming Christian. Overcoming Christians are joyful Christians. Andrae Crouch put it in a song years ago: “If I never had a problem, I wouldn’t know that He could solve them.” We sing here an invitational hymn, “Just as I am without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me; O Lamb of God, I come to Thee,” that was written by Charlotte Elliott, who came out of a time when, actually, everything was going her way, and she came to the Lord. But there was another songwriter whose songs we sing often, and her name is Fanny Crosby.

Fanny Crosby was blind as a child. And, I want you to hear what little Fanny Crosby wrote when she was only 8 years old. And she said, this little blind child—I want you to listen to it: “Oh, what a happy soul am I, although I cannot see; I am resolved that in this world contented I will be. How many blessings I enjoy that other people don’t; to weep inside because I’m blind, I cannot, and I won’t.” That she probably had learned from James. “Count it all joy.” So, the first fruit that we can reap is enjoyment.

The second is endurance. Now, look, if you will, here in verse 3: “Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.” The word *patience* here, *hupomone*, literally means to bear up under trial; steadfastness; endurance. You will be a more steadfast Christian if you learn to rejoice in trials. God gives you these burdens to teach you endurance, and there’s no other way to learn endurance. Listen. You’ll never learn endurance if you don’t have anything to endure. Does that make sense? And endurance is a Christian virtue. It’s called patience. And, literally, endurance is the word. Not the kind of patience it takes to thread a needle, not the kind of patience it takes to build a model airplane, but patience to bear up under trials.

I read somewhere years ago about an old grandfather’s clock that sat in the hall, and it had those heavy weights on it. And somebody came along, and said, “This clock has been bearing those weights for such a long time. I’ll remove the weights.” And the clock said, “Don’t remove those weights. Those are what keep me going.” And God allows those pressures there to keep us going.

Now, here’s the third fruit, if you’re having difficulty and heartache. First of all, the first fruit is enjoyment—an overcoming Christian is a victorious Christian. Secondly, endurance—God is going to teach you patience, and you’ll never learn patience unless you have something to endure. Thirdly, enlargement. Look, if you will, here in this passage of Scripture in verse 4: “But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be

perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” Now, the word perfect here doesn’t mean sinless. It’s the word *teleos*. It means mature. The idea is maturity. How are you going to get maturity? By living a life of ease? No! No pain, no gain. You grow under stress. Just as a man goes to the gymnasium, and lifts weights, and puts his muscles under stress, that’s the way they grow. Many of us don’t want any trials, we don’t want any hurts, and therefore, we’re spiritual cream puffs. And so, enlargement is one of the blessed fruits.

Last of all, enrichment. Notice again in verse 4: “Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire—here it is—wanting—that is, needing—nothing.” Trials, testing, heartache, tears, difficulty—they do not rob you; what they do is enrich you. And the idea is that we’re not going to live a life of inadequacy. God is going to enrich us when we go through these things. I would not choose them. I do not want them. I have experienced them. And I can look back on them, and say, I hope I never have to do it again. But, thank God, I did, and thank God, I grew through all of that. We sing, “When through fiery trials, thy pathway shall lie; my grace all sufficient shall thy supply. The flames shall not hurt thee; I only design thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.”

Conclusion

Now, you cannot pass the tests of life until you enroll in school. And you enroll in school when you give your heart to Jesus Christ.

Would you bow your heads in prayer? Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. And, let me just encourage you right now, if you’ve never done it, to give your heart to Jesus Christ. Now, I’m going to lead you in a prayer. And, boys and girls—and we have a lot of boys and girls here tonight—some of the boys and girls here tonight need to give their hearts to Jesus Christ. To be saved, first of all, you must know that you are a sinner. Not just that you’ve done bad, but you are a sinner by nature, that there’s something inside of you that is very wrong. And the Bible calls that sin. And we do the things that we do because we are sinners on the inside in our nature. And that sin means that we’re lost and separated from God. You must understand this. The second thing you must understand is that while we are sinners, and that sin has separated us from God, God sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to become our substitute, to take our punishment, to die on the cross in our place. We must understand this. But even that is not enough. We must receive by faith what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross. The Bible calls that believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. But that doesn’t mean just believing that He died. It means trusting the Lord Jesus Christ, just as you would trust an airplane when you get on it. You trust the Lord Jesus Christ, and you say, “Lord, I give You my heart. I give You my life forever. I receive You, by faith, as my Lord and Savior.” But

when you get on that airplane, wherever the airplane goes, you go. And when you trust Jesus, wherever He goes, you follow. He becomes your Lord and your Master. Would you pray a prayer like this: “Lord Jesus—just pray it—I am a sinner. My sin deserves judgment, but I want mercy. Thank You, Jesus, that You loved me enough to be my substitute to die on the cross for my sin. Thank You for that. Lord Jesus, now I open my heart. I receive You as my Lord and Savior. I commit my life to You. I trust You, Jesus. And now, Lord Jesus, I will follow You wherever You lead me, and I will make it public that I have trusted You. I will not be ashamed of You. And I will do it tonight. In Your name I pray. Amen.

Praying for Wisdom

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: November 1, 1981

Main Scripture Text: James 1:1–8

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”

JAMES 1:5

Outline

Introduction

I. The Freedom to Pray

II. The Faith to Pray

III. The Firmness to Pray

Conclusion

Introduction

I want us to find the Book of James chapter 1—the Book of James chapter 1. We’re going to be talking today about “How to Pray for Wisdom”—“How to Pray for Wisdom.” James chapter 1, beginning in verse 1: *“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. My brethren, count it all joy when you fall in to divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways”* (James 1:1–8). “How to Pray for Wisdom.”

Sooner or later, you’re going to face one of the tests of life. That’s what James is talking about here when he says, “Count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations,” in verse 2. The word *temptations* there does not mean a solicitation to do evil, but it means “testings, trials, heartaches, difficulties, and misunderstandings.” They’re going to happen to you, and in order for you to pass this test, it’s going to take more than knowledge.

Now if you’re in school and you have to pass a test, then you can study for that test and you pass that test with knowledge. But this is a test that you’re going to have to

pass with wisdom. And you can have a head full of knowledge and fail this test. It will take the wisdom of God to pass this test. And so after James talks to us about the trials, the temptations, the falsities of life, then he talks to us about wisdom: what it is and how to get it, and how to pray for wisdom. I want you to pay attention, because sooner or later you're going to be asked to answer one of these tests of life. It may be just right around the corner.

Now I want to say again that knowledge, though it is very, very important, is not going to do you any good in passing this test. Do you know the difference between wisdom and knowledge? Some people think they're the same, but they are not. You see, knowledge is learned; wisdom is given. Knowledge comes from studying; wisdom comes from meditation on the Word of God. Knowledge comes by looking around; wisdom comes by looking up. Knowledge will fail you; wisdom will not fail you. A man may have a lot of knowledge and not have wisdom.

As a matter of fact, last night I found a verse that was interesting to me. It was Job chapter 32, verse 9, and just jot it in your margin, but here's what it says: "*Great men are not always wise*" (Job 32:9). That's very interesting.

You know, there have been some very great men. Let's think for example about President Nixon. I think President Nixon was a great man, but I certainly would say there were some areas in which he was not wise. "*Great men are not always wise.*" It is possible that a man may have all kinds of knowledge and yet he does not know wisdom.

Einstein was a great man. He was a brilliant man. He died in 1955. But do you know what Einstein said? And I quote—he said, "I feel like a man chained. If I could only be free from the shackles of my intellectual smallness, then I could understand the universe in which I live." But he was dead wrong. If you were to double his IQ, triple his IQ, and quadruple his IQ, he would still not understand the universe in which he lived. He thought that if you had a bigger brain, he thought that he could learn more, he could understand it and the world.

But that is not true. The Bible says, "*The world by wisdom [knows] not God*" (1 Corinthians 1:21), that is, by intellectual wisdom, by knowledge, by man's wisdom. But God reveals these things through His Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10)—spiritual wisdom.

Look, for example, to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 for a moment. We're going to be using a lot of Scripture this morning, so let's just get started early, and turn, if you will, to 1 Corinthians chapter 1. I want you to notice something here. First Corinthians chapter 1, beginning in verse 18: "*For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness;*"—that Christ Jesus died for our sins, the unsaved man, he curls the lip at that—"but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise?"—that is, the earthly wise—"where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this

world?”—he’s talking about the wise of this world—“hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God be the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” Not foolish preaching, but the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. “For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18–24).

I wish Einstein could have known that: Christ, the power of God; Christ, the wisdom of God. No man will ever know true wisdom until he knows Jesus Christ, who is the wisdom of God.

Now what is wisdom? Knowledge is the accumulation of facts. But what is wisdom? Wisdom is seeing life from God’s point of view—wisdom is seeing life from God’s point of view. Wisdom is practical insight into the ways of God. You know, Moses, in Exodus chapter 33, verses 12 through 15, prayed a very unusual prayer. God was getting ready for Moses to do something marvelous and wonderful and to lead His people, and Moses said, “God, show me thy way—show me thy way.” And the Bible says in Psalm 103 and verse 7 that God “*made known his ways unto Moses, [and] his acts...*”—a-c-t-s— “*his acts unto the children of Israel*” (Psalm 103:7). There were two levels of understanding. The Jewish children of Israel, they saw the acts of God; they saw what God was doing. But Moses knew the ways of God. Moses knew why God was doing it. They had knowledge, and Moses had wisdom. Wisdom is understanding the ways of God. Wisdom is seeing life from God’s point of view.

Now as you study that Old Testament passage of Scripture and the things that followed, those children of Israel followed Moses around through the wilderness, 40 years they were out there. And God said He was doing it as a test, exactly the same thing that James is talking about, being tested. And they flunked the test ignominiously and miserably. They were always murmuring and complaining—in the vernacular, bellyaching—all the time, talking about why this, and why is that. All they could see was what God was doing. All they could see was the acts of God, and if God would bless them. And they were going through the Red Sea dry shod. Oh, they were singing the song of Moses and the Lamb (Revelation 15:3). They were praising Moses. Everything was so fine and good. Then the first thing you know they got out there somewhere and there didn’t seem to be any water, there didn’t seem to be any bread, and oh, how they murmured, and how they scolded, and how they chided. All they knew was what God was doing, but they never understood why God was doing it. They, ladies and gentleman, saw the acts of God but they never saw the ways of God.

Do you know what wisdom is? Wisdom is knowing the ways of God. Wisdom is

seeing life from God's point of view. And how important it is that you need to see and learn to see light from God's point of view.

Now if you don't, you're going to be complaining and fussing; you're not going to be blessed. You see, they were not blessed because they did not obey. There is no blessing without obedience. But wait a minute: there will be no obedience unless there's trust. But wait a minute: there will be no trust unless there is love. But wait a minute: there will be no love unless there is knowledge. But wait a minute: there will be no knowledge, real knowledge, unless there's wisdom. You see, to know God is to love Him, and then to love Him is to trust Him, and to trust Him is to obey Him, and to obey Him is to be blessed. But dear friend, it all begins with wisdom, to pray as Moses prayed, "Lord, show me thy way," or as James taught us to pray, *"If any [among] you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him"* (James 1:5).

Listen to me this morning, friend. The test is coming, the trials are coming, and if all you see is what God is doing and you don't learn to see life from God's point of view, you're going to fail the test of life, you're not going to be able to count it all joy.

Now if you want me to pray for you this morning, what would you ask me to pray for you for? Well, let me tell you what Paul thinks that we need to be prayed for. Turn, if you will, to Ephesians, for example, chapter 1, and let's see what Paul prayed for the church at Ephesus. Ephesians chapter 1, begin in verse 15—Paul says, *"Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus,"*—that is, when I heard you got saved—*"and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;"*—now watch it; here's what he prayed—*"that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him"* (Ephesians 1:15–17). That's what Paul thought was very important for the saints at Ephesus. I want to tell you that's what Paul thinks is very important for the saints in Memphis, Tennessee.

Now just go right on through the Book of Philippians to the Book of Colossians chapter 1 for a moment; just turn right and go to Colossians chapter 1, verse 9. Let us see what Paul thought was important for the saints at Colossae. He says, *"For this cause we also, since the day we heard of it,"*—talking about their faith—*"do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding"* (Colossians 1:9). Paul said, "I prayed for you, I prayed for you, I prayed for you, that you might have wisdom, that you might have wisdom, that you might have wisdom, that you might have wisdom." It is wisdom, ladies and gentleman, that we need.

Now having said all of that by way of introduction, let's go back to our passage here and think about how to pray for wisdom. Here's what James tells us after he warns us

about the tests of life that are coming, and after he's telling us that it's wisdom and not knowledge that will cause us to pass that test. I want you to see what James says. I want to read it again here in verse 5: *"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways."*

Now there are three things that James tells us here about how to pray for wisdom, and I pray God today that He'll help me to transfer them from my heart to your heart.

I. The Freedom to Pray

First of all, James speaks of the freedom to pray—the freedom to pray. Notice the gracious invitation in verse 5: *"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God,"*—notice again the freedom—*"that giveth to all men liberally,"*—and notice again—*"and upbraideth not."* That means He won't scold you for asking. Do you know what this literally says? Now we don't translate it this way, but "you let him ask a giving God." Do you know that kind of a God? Hallelujah! Praise God! He is a giving God, and the Bible says, "Let him ask the giving God." He's not the selfish God, not the stingy God, not the God of the clenched fist; He is the giving God. That's the way He wants Himself designated in the Word of God.

Someone has well said that prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance; prayer is laying hold of God with willingness. It's God who invites us to come and wants us to come. Somehow we get the idea that prayer is talking God into doing something that He ordinarily wouldn't want to do, that prayer is sort of twisting God's arm behind His back until finally we get God to come grudgingly and give us what we need. But the Bible says here He is the giving God. Oh, how He encourages us to ask. He's not going to scold us. We say, "God, I need wisdom." He's not going to say, "What did you say? Are you pestering me again? Do you mean to say that you're coming to me one more time and asking me for wisdom? Shame on you!" Oh no, no, no! James says He won't scold us. He's not going to chide us; He's not going to upbraid us for asking. Let him ask. He giveth to all men liberally, cheerfully.

*Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring;
For his grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much. (John Newton)*

He is the giving God.

And so He's the one who invites you, and when the trials of life come, you don't

need to go around wringing your hands; you need to be bending your knees. He talks of the trials of life, and then he says, “If any of you lack wisdom to pass this test, then ask of God.” And oh, you have the freedom to pray to God. Did you know the devil knows that you have this freedom but he doesn’t want you to know it? Now the devil doesn’t want your prayers to be answered. Now I want you to pay attention to this, and if you don’t get anything else that I’ve said today, I pray God that you’ll get this. The devil knows that he can’t keep God from answering your prayers, so he tries to keep you from asking them, see? That’s what the devil does. He can’t keep God from answering, so he does the next best thing: he tries to keep you from asking those prayers. But the Bible says, “Let him ask God, that gives liberally to all men, and it shall be given him.”

Oh, you read there in the Bible when the Lord Jesus Christ died in agony and blood upon that cross. The Bible says that the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom. That veil of the temple separated the holy place from the Holy of Holies, and in that Holy of Holies dwelt the glory of God, and only the high priest could go once a year with a basin of blood. But when Jesus died, that veil was rent from top to bottom, not from bottom to top as though some man had done it, but top to bottom as God had done it. And the way is made into the Holy of Holies, and that’s the reason the writer of the Book of Hebrews says in Hebrews chapter 4, verse 16, “Let us come boldly to the throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:16). What does that mean? It means because Jesus Christ has died upon the cross, the veil is rent, we have instant access, and we have constant access into the Holy of Holies. Instantly, constantly, the Lord is saying, “Let him ask, let him ask, let him ask.”

The devil wants to keep you from praying for wisdom today. But I want to tell you with the function and unction of my soul that you have the function. Incidentally, talking about unction, that’s what wisdom is. Wisdom is function: function with unction. That’s what it is. Wisdom—God gives you the ability to that spiritual function so that you can function with the unction that God gives. God is offering Himself to you. He will not scold, but He will freely hear your prayer.

II. The Faith to Pray

Second thing: not only is there the freedom to pray, but along with that freedom to pray there must be the faith to pray. Look in verse 6. It says, “*But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.*” “*Let him ask in faith.*” Why is this so important? Hebrews 11, verse 6, says, “*But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*” (Hebrews 11:6). Oh, how you must pray in faith! Jesus is speaking—Matthew 21, verse 22: “*All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive*” (Matthew 21:22). Jot this one down: Mark chapter 11 and verse 24: “*Therefore I say unto you...*”—and again

Jesus is speaking—*“Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them”* (Mark 11:24). Do you know what we say around here? “Pray, believe, you’ll receive; pray in doubt, you’ll do without.”

Now James says, “Let him ask in faith—let him ask in faith.” Along with that freedom to pray must come the faith to pray. I want to make a point. I hope I don’t confuse you. But he doesn’t say, “Pray with faith”; he says, “Pray in faith.” Faith is not some sort of an additive, sort of a heavenly sort that you shake in to make your prayers run more smoothly. No, no, no, no! You don’t pray with faith; you pray in faith. You say, “What’s the difference?” Well, don’t get the idea that you just get a list of things out here that you want and then you sprinkle a little foo foo dust over it called faith, and then it’s a fact, whatever you want is yours because you prayed with faith. Oh, no, no, no! It says to pray in faith.

What does it mean to pray in faith? What is the difference? Well, you see when God wants to do something for you, when God has something that He desires for you, God places the faith in your heart so that you should pray for it. The faith that you have in your heart is the evidence that God wants to do that thing for you.

For example, those people who are watching this television program right now, the television program that you see is the evidence of the television station. The program doesn’t bring the station into being; the station brings the program into being.

Now our faith does not bring things into being; things bring our faith into being. You see, when God wants to do something for us, that fact is already settled in the heart and mind of God, and the Bible says, *“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”* (Hebrews 11:1). Even though you can’t see it, the evidence is there. Because it is there, it is substance; it is real. Faith is substance; it is real, spiritual steel and concrete in it. And so I hope I’m not confusing you.

I told the earlier congregation I felt that I got my foot in a bucket about this time in this message, and maybe it got a little confusing, but it’s very important that you understand that the Bible says that we pray in faith. That is, when we know that God wants us to have something, do something, be something, then God puts that faith in our hearts. Then we pray in faith and it is done. And you see, *“Faith [comes] by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Romans 10:17).

Now I know that I can ask God for wisdom and have it, because He’s made a clear immutable, unbreakable promise to me in the Word of God. *“If any of you”—that’s me—“lack wisdom,”—that’s me again—“let him”—that’s me again—“ask of God...and it shall be given him.”* And so I can say, when I need wisdom, when my heart is right, and when I come before God, I can say, “Dear Lord, I am praying in faith for what you promised. And I’m claiming it on the authority of your Word.” Not just praying with faith; I’m praying

in faith. I'm praying as God wants me to pray, because God has given me something with which to pray. My prayer, therefore, issues from my faith. It's not faith that just simply is sprinkled over my prayer. It's not, "Believe it and it will be true"; it means, "It is true, so therefore believe it." *"Faith [comes] by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."*

Now it's very important that you understand that, because we've got some folks going around today saying, "Name it and claim it." No, friend, God names it so you can claim it. And right here, God names it—God names it. God says, "If you need wisdom, ask God, and it will be given to you, but just ask in faith."

And so first of all, there is the freedom to pray. But along with that freedom to pray for wisdom there comes that faith to pray for wisdom. And *"faith [comes] by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* And so since God has promised we can pray with faith, we can ask God, we can believe, we can receive, and therefore we can achieve, because God Himself has promised it.

III. The Firmness to Pray

All right now, thirdly—thirdly—not only must there be that freedom to pray, and not only must there be that faith to pray, but then along with it there must come that firmness to pray. Look again in verse 6: *"But let him ask in faith,"*—now notice that next phrase—*"nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways."* James says the double-minded man, it's not that he's just not going to get wisdom; he's not going to get anything. *"Let not that man think that he shall receive any thing from the Lord."*

So far as I can find, James is the only one in the Bible who uses this phrase, *"double minded,"* the *"double minded man."* Now I've seen illustrations of double-mindedness all through the Bible, but this phrase is unique, I believe, with Brother James. Do you know what it literally means? Literally, it means two souls—two souls—a man with two souls. Here's a man trying to face both ways at the same time. Here's a man who's a spiritual soul. Here's a man who is double-minded. Here's a man who is unstable. He's not going to receive anything from the Lord. He's trying to hold on to the world with one hand; he's trying to hold on to God with the other hand.

It reminds me of the fellow up on the Mason-Dixon line, didn't know whether he wanted to belong to Confederacy or the Union, so he put on gray trousers and a blue coat. Poor guy got shot in the pants and the back.

A double-minded, unstable, good Lord, good devil type of guy. James says, "Let not that man think that he shall receive any thing from the Lord." There must be this resoluteness; there must be this firmness to pray.

You know, I found a verse last night; I just went in my study last night and got alone and God showed me a verse. I don't believe I'd ever even noticed it before, but I want to share it with you. Isaiah chapter 29—turn to it, Isaiah chapter 29—very interesting verse, dealing with this subject of being two-souled, facing both ways at the same time. Isaiah chapter 29—look, beginning in verse 11: *“And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed...”*—that is, God's revelation of all that He's doing and all He wants to do is to some people like a sealed book. Is that the way the Bible is to you when you try to read it sometimes—like a sealed book? *“And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed.”* You bring this book to a man, he has his PhD, he has all the accoutrements of learning, he knows all of the languages: “Read it.” He says, “I can't read it; it's a sealed book.” And then verse 12: *“And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned.”* “I can't read it either. I can't decipher; I can't make it out.” And there are so many people who are coming to the Bible with exactly this problem. The Bible to them is a closed book; it is a sealed book. It's like a scholar: he has all of the learning, but his book is sealed. Or it's like a man who's never learned how to read and he can't even make sense out of the words. All it is, is just marking on paper. He doesn't understand it. Why is this? Well, continue to read here in verse 13: *“Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me,”*—but now watch it—*“but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:”*—that is, it's only something that they've heard about; they don't really know—*“therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid”* (Isaiah 29:11–14).

God says, “I'm going to judge you. Your wise men, their wisdom will be as naught. The understanding of your scholars is going. It evaporates. You're not going to know, and you're not going to perceive my ways; you're not going to understand life from my point of view.” And why? Well, reason is very simple. Look in verse 13 again: *“Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me.”* Do you know what that is? That's a double-minded man. That is a double minded man. He says one thing with his mouth; he says something else with his heart.

Jesus said, “There is a people that honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (Matthew 15:8; Mark 7:6). These spiritual souls are not going to receive anything from the Lord. They're double-minded. They're unstable in all of their ways. Their life is like a spiritual storm center. They're driven and tossed with the winds. They

waver. They're hot and cold. They blow hot, blow cold, good Lord, good devil, wishy washy, on again, off again, type of people. No wonder they don't receive anything from the Lord. Oh, friend, let me tell you something. If you possess wisdom, wisdom must possess you. You must mean business with God.

Thank God there's the freedom to pray: God, the giving God, invites you to pray. Thank God there's the faith to pray: for we have a promise from the Word of God. But there must be the firmness to pray: "*Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.*" The reason that many of us do not get our prayers answered is that we are not single-minded. I was reading again in the Sermon on the Mount last night where Jesus said, "If your eye be single, then your body will be full of light" (Matthew 6:22; Luke 11:34). Do you know what a body full of light is? That's wisdom. "If your eye is single—if your eye is single—then your body will be full of light."

Can you say with the Apostle Paul, "*This one thing I do*" (Philippians 3:13)? You see, we're to be single in our determination. We're to be single in our desire. Do you want wisdom? Let me give you a verse. Jot it down; read it when you get home—Proverbs chapter 3, verses 13 through 15. You're going to find out there that wisdom is compared to rubies and diamonds and emeralds and precious gems. When you start seeking wisdom as you search for gold and rubies and diamonds—or let's translate that into dollar bills—then you're going to find wisdom—when you're single-minded. You see, we need to be single in our desire, single in our determination, single in our devotion. Jesus said, "*No man can serve two masters*" (Matthew 6:24). You just can't do it. You're double-minded, and because of that you'll be unstable in all of your ways. You're like a wave; the wind just blows you about.

Years ago, I read a story about a knight back in the days of Camelot, back in the days of the crusades, when they had knights in shining armor. This knight upon his white horse saw a beautiful girl—she was a vision of loveliness. He rode up to her and he said, "Oh, you are the loveliest lady upon the face of the earth. Your beauty is exquisite, without parallel. I desire to have you for my wife. And if you but marry me, I will give you my full heart's devotion. I will love you. I will serve you. I will honor you. I will protect you. I will be faithful to you till death. You are the most lovely of all of the ladies, the fairest of the fair." "Oh," she said, "handsome, for this promise of love, thank you; for this promise of devotion, thank you; for this promise of faithfulness. But before I say yes, in all honesty I must tell you, you've not yet seen my sister who is even more fair, even more lovely, even more desirable, than I." "Oh," he said, "it is impossible." "No," she said, "my sister is exquisitely beautiful; you must look at her first." "Well," he said, "where is she?" She said, "Right over the hill." So the knight on his white horse goes riding over the hill and he sees the sister, and then he comes back, and he says, "Oh no, no, no, she's not nearly so fair as thou art. You're the one I desire. You're the

one I want to marry. You are the fairest of the fair. I will be true to thee. I want thee for my wife.” She said, “You will not have me.” And he said, “Why?” She said, “You said that I was the fairest of the fair, and you would be true to me till death, and at my first suggestion you rode off to look at another woman.”

“O Lord Jesus, I love thee. O Lord Jesus, I would be true to thee till death. Whom have I on earth but thee?” And then the devil comes and dangles some dainty before us, and off we go—double-minded, unstable in all our ways. Is it any wonder that the Lord cannot commit Himself to us—because we will not commit ourselves to Him?

Conclusion

James says that we need wisdom. There is the freedom to pray. There is the faith to pray. But there must be the firmness to pray, nothing wavering. *“He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.”* *“A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.”* What will happen when we let go of this world with both hands and take hold of Jesus Christ with both hands? I tell you, God will be giving us wisdom. We’ll know the ways of God. We’ll be meeting the trials of life. We’ll be overcoming those trials. We’ll count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations. And people will look at us, and they’ll say, “What makes those people different?” And they’ll know it’s Jesus—they’ll know it’s Jesus. Single in our devotion, single in our determination, single, and not double-minded—single-minded. *“This one thing I do.”*

Learning to Endure

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: July 11, 2004

Main Scripture Text: James 1:2–8

“Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.”

JAMES 1:3

Outline

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I. Enjoyment

II. Enlargement

III. Enlightenment

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Conclusion

Introduction

Thank you, Joyce. I love you. And, I thank God you live what you sing and sing what you live. And, every morning when I wake up, she’s already up and already singing, and I wake up to a song of praise. Thank you. Now, I’m going to get all full and not be able to preach. But, I want to speak to you today about learning to endure. Now, this is sort of a re-entry message. And, we have learned to endure some things, and I don’t want to act like we endure so much because, really, I want to say with the Apostle Paul, *“Our light affliction...is but for a moment”* (2 Corinthians 4:17). There are many of you who have endured and are enduring right now more than I endured in this surgery and this recovery. I’ve learned some things, and I want to delineate those from God’s Word.

And, I want you to find the Book of James, if you will, and I want you to find the first chapter in that book. And, we’re going to think today about what God teaches in that wonderful book about learning to endure. I’m going to tell you something about God: God is a strange teacher—He gives the test first and then gives the lesson. And, many of you are going through a test or a trial. Look here in James chapter 1; let’s begin in verse 2: *“My brethren, count it all joy when [you] fall into divers temptations”—*that is just simply “different kinds of” temptations—*“Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him”* (James 1:2–5).

Now, look up here, and I want to ask you a question: How many of you this morning want strength? How many of you want victory? How many of you want prosperity? How many of you want contentment? All of us do. But, let me ask you another question: How many of you want tribulation? Most of us don't. But, it is tribulation that works patience, which literally means "endurance" (James 2:3). And, without patience, without endurance, you're not going to have these other things, because tribulation works endurance (James 2:3).

Now, the word *patience* in our King James Bible here doesn't mean "the ability to thread a needle." The Greek word *hypomone* means "to abide under." God lays certain burdens on us, and we must abide under those burdens or we're not going to have anything else. Now folks, let me tell you something: we need to work by faith, and we need to praise God by faith; but we need to wait by faith.

Years ago, when the Earth's crust was first hardening, I was playing football. And, you know, when I got out there on that football field, for the first time in my life I had the ball and there was no one between myself and the goal. Now, you just have to understand what a thrill that was. The first time ever I had the ball, I had broken loose, and there was the goal line. This was my big day. And, I was running as hard as I could, but I was running out of steam also. And, I saw the goal line, and I said, "Well, one thing's for certain—that guy behind me is not going to catch me before I score." And, I dived over the goal line—had it made. But, do you know what? It wasn't the goal line. It was the five-yard line. How humiliating that I never reached the goal because I quit too soon. Some of us can quit too soon. We don't learn to endure.

Now, if you don't learn to endure, you're not going to learn much of anything. You're not going to learn to play the piano if you don't learn to endure and do the scales. You're not going to learn Greek if you don't endure and do the Greek verbs. You're not going to lose weight unless you learn to endure. You're not going to build character unless you endure.

Now, in the passage that we have here, the word for temptation in verse 2 literally means "trials" or "testing." Look, if you will, in verse 2: "*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations*" (James 1:2). Well, what does it mean there by "*divers temptations*" (James 1:2)? Should we say, "Praise God, I'm being tempted to sin"? No, the word may be used as a temptation to sin, or that same word is used in the Bible as a testing, a trial.

Now, let's look at those. You see, we get the test from God. We get the temptations from the devil. Don't get the idea that God is tempting you to sin. In James chapter 1, verse 13: "*Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with [sin], neither tempteth he any man*" (James 1:13). God will not tempt you to sin. The devil will, but God will not. You know, if God tempted you to sin, you'd have a

perfect excuse. Who can resist God? He's the master tempter. No, only the devil will tempt you to sin. God will test you. The devil will tempt you to cause you to stumble. God will test you to cause you to stand. And, what we're talking about this morning is endurance under trials—under testings—that God gives to us so we can grow. And, notice he doesn't say *if* you're tempted, but *when* you're tempted. Look in verse 2: "*My brethren, count it all joy when*"—"when"—"*ye fall into divers temptations*" (James 1:2).

Now, these tests—these trials—produce patience. That is endurance. And, let me give you an ancillary scripture to put in your margin there if you have a Bible and don't mind writing in it. Write right alongside James chapter 1, verse 3, "Romans 5, verse 3": "*And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience*" (Romans 5:3). Now, when you're praying to God, "God, give me endurance; give me patience," well, you're going to have to have something to endure before you can ever learn anything about endurance and patience. And so, when you pray for patience, don't be afraid to do that. Don't be afraid of God's tribulation. God is not trying to cause you to stumble but to stand. A wise man said, "The bumps are what you climb on," and that is so true.

Now, I want to say to all of us who are sons and daughters of God, don't get the idea that the Christian life is all sunlight and roses, that there will be no heartache, that there will be no tears. There is tribulation, and Jesus said, "In this world ye shall have tribulation." (John 16:33) So, if you're going through deep sorrow, trouble, pain, anguish, disappointment, that doesn't mean something has gone wrong. It means that the Word of God is true.

Now, what if the temptation is a temptation to sin from the devil, what should you do? You ought to pray; you ought to praise God. I mean, in the midst of it, praise God. Now, you know what the devil's going to say? "Look here at what I'm doing to this individual, and it's causing him to pray and praise God. I'd better stop." If it's from God, you ought to praise Him and pray because He does all things well. And, it's not a sin to be tempted. Jesus was tempted "*in all points...like as we are*" (Hebrews 4:15). And, let me tell you something about these tests: these tests are tests to let us know that God is real in the darkest night. Would you like to fly on an airplane that had never been tested? Well, listen—*the faith that can't be tested can't be trusted*. And so, God is going to give us tests and trials.

And again, I want to say that this thing I've been through has not been like what some of you are going through today, or have gone through, or will go through. But, I want to mention five things that I've learned, and I pray that God will write them on your heart. And, see if you can learn them also.

I. Enjoyment

And, the first one is going to surprise you. I have learned enjoyment—enjoyment. Look in James chapter 1, verse 2: *“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations”—“count it...joy”* (James 1:2). Now, that doesn’t mean grin and bear it, but it means to rejoice in the Lord. Why do we count it all joy? Because if God gives you a test and you overcome, overcoming Christians are joyful Christians. Andrea Crouch wrote a song we’ve stopped singing, but it’s a great song: “If I’d never had a problem / I wouldn’t know God could solve them.” So, when they come, rather than moaning and groaning, pull some of the groans out of your prayers, shove in a few hallelujahs, and count it all joy.

Barbara Johnson wrote a book. One statement in that book is worth the entire book, where she said in that book that “pain is inevitable, but misery is optional”—“pain is inevitable; misery is optional.” Now, you can be miserable if you want to, but you can, in the midst of your trial, in the midst of your tribulation, have joy. Paul and Silas were in that Philippian jail, and at midnight they were signing praises unto God. The writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 10, verse 34 that they *“took joyfully the spoiling of [their] goods”* (Hebrews 10:34).

One of my dearest friends is a man named Joseph T’son. He was a modern-day apostle to Romania. When that cruel despot Ceausescu was persecuting the Christians, putting them in prison, putting many of them to death by one means or another, Joseph was preaching the Word of God. They tried to put a bridle on Joseph, but he kept preaching. One day, the Gestapo, as it were, the strong-armed people of Ceausescu, came to Joseph’s home unannounced and said, “We’re going to go through your library”—well, a preacher’s library is very precious to him; it’s like a good friend—“And, we’re going to make you sign every one of the books in your library. And then, we’re going to go back and have the scholars to look through those books. And, if there’s any book in this library that denigrates the government, then we’re going to put you in jail.” Now, Joseph and his wife sat there as they were taking his books down, one book after another, and making him sign that book. And, Joseph told me—he said, “I was miserable—I was miserable. It was awful.” But, he said, “Then they handed me a book to sign. It said *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory: Are You Experiencing it Now?* And, Joseph learned what Barbara Johnson said—that pain is inevitable, but misery is optional. *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory*—and Joseph said, “I will rejoice in You, our God.” And, he told his wife, “Elizabeth, we have guests in our house. Fix some coffee for us.” And, he began to praise the Lord.

You see, the first truth of tribulation ought to be enjoyment. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 7 and verse 4: *“I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation”* (2 Corinthians 7:14). Well, that’s great—so great. Put that scripture in a margin—2 Corinthians chapter

7 and verse 4.

II. Enlargement

Now, here's the second truth that I have learned—not only enjoyment, but enlargement—enlargement. You grow when trials come. Look, if you will, in James 1, verse 4—look at it: *“But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing”* (James 1:4). Now, look at that word *perfect*. It's the Greek word *teleea*, and it doesn't mean “sinless.” The Bible says of Jesus, *“The captain of [our] salvation [was made] perfect through sufferings”* (Hebrews 2:10). He wasn't made sinless through suffering. He was already perfect and sinless. But, the word *teleea* means “mature”—“mature.” **An oak tree is the perfection of an acorn. And, somebody has written these words: “When you're discouraged and feeling a little blue, take a look at a mighty oak and see what a nut can do.” That oak tree is the perfection of an acorn. It means “maturity.” We grow under stress.**

I was looking this morning at Psalm 4 and verse 1. The psalmist said, *“Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress”* (Psalm 4:1). When did you grow much? When did you grow the most—when you had no problems or when stress came? When problems came and you learned to endure, that is when you grew the most. And, not only does enjoyment come, but enlargement comes. Maturity comes. **Now, when you're under stress—when your physical body is under stress when you're lifting weights, then your muscles begin to grow.** You know, the problem today is so many Christians who are not *teleea*—they're not mature, they're not perfect, they're not fully ripe.

This morning I had a mango for breakfast. I love mangos—I do. I believe that the Garden of Eden was full of them. And, if you don't like them, it makes me very happy 'cause that means there's more for me. And, mangos are just a wonderful fruit. The best mango, in my estimation, is called a Haden mango, and it's exotic. I wish I could show you a Haden mango when it is fully sun-ripened. The top is red. Then it bleeds off to sort of an orangey-red. Then it bleeds into a yellow. And, at the very tip is a spot of green. Now, that's the way it is when it is sun-ripened. The mangoes you get in the supermarket are not sun-ripened because they don't have any shelf life. But, when a mango is sun-ripened and you smell it—that's exotic—that's ecstasy to the nostrils to smell it. And, when you peel it, the inside is like butter. What does it taste like? Pineapple—yes; orange—yes; peach—yes; banana—yes. It's a combination of all of these. And, it is ecstasy to get one and let the juice drip off your chin. That's a mango.

But, let me tell you about a mango. A mango, to be that way, has to be sun-ripened, not ripened on the shelf in your house—one that you brought out of the supermarket. Now, those are good; and if any of you want to buy me some in the supermarket, I'm not saying, “Don't do that,” but I'm saying there's something about something that has

become *te/lea*—it has become mature. Have you ever seen any Christians who were picked green? They never mature. They never quite get there. Sometimes a young preacher will show giftedness, ability, and he has the natural gift of preaching. He has a good vocabulary, and he has some convictions. But, so many times, he is put on the circuit in the conferences, and he preaches his handful of sermons. Then, later on, you learn that he failed, he fell, he disgraced the Lord. What was the matter with this young preacher? He was picked green. The Bible says when you ordain a man, don't ordain a novice, lest he be tempted with pride—*"lifted up with pride [and] fall under the condemnation of the devil"* (1 Timothy 3:6).

Now, what does it teach us? Enjoyment. What does it teach us? Enlargement—maturity.

III. Enlightenment

I'll tell you another thing we learn from the trials and temptations, and that is enlightenment. We learn some wonderful things. We get wisdom when these come. Look, if you will, at James 1, verses 4 through 8: *"But let patience"*—that is, "maturity"—*"have her perfect work, that ye may be [mature] and entire, wanting nothing. And if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not"*—that means "He won't scold you for asking"—*"and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all [of] his ways"* (James 1:4–8).

Now, when trials come—difficulties come—you need enlightenment. You need wisdom—the wisdom that Joyce sang about. You know, old Job had trials and temptations. You're familiar with the Book of Job. Job was asking God, "God, why?" And, Job had some friends who tried to explain to him why. And, you know the whole story of Job; but finally, Job said to God, "I'd like to bring You into court. I want to sue You for damages." Now, it wasn't that Job was being disrespectful, but he said, "O God, I would like to argue with You about this thing." And, God said, "Okay, you want to argue?" And, God began to ask Job questions—questions that Job could not even begin to give the reason for, about things that Job could not understand at all. And, in the end of the book, Job stops asking, "Why?" and starts remembering *Who*. And, that's what we have to do: remember *Who*.

Those of you who are counselors—your job is not to solve people's problems. If you do that, they'll become dependent upon you. Ultimately, your job is to bring them to God—not to answer the *why*, but to point them to the *Who*. And, in tribulation, God will give you this kind of wisdom if you'll pray and ask Him for this kind of wisdom. It is a mark of growth when we stop asking, "Why?" and start remembering *Who*. You know, a

person can have a PhD and still act like a fool. When trials come, ask God for wisdom. Look again in James 1, verse 4: *“But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him”*—but now, watch verse 6—*“But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think he shall receive any thing of the Lord”* (James 1:4–7). As you pray in faith, you can say, “Dear God, I know that it is Your will that I have wisdom. Thank You for giving me wisdom.”

Don't be like a wave; a wave is treacherous. One time, Joyce and I were in Hawaii, and we went down to the beach. And, I saw the most magnificent waves, and I said to Joyce, “Joyce, you sit up here on the shore. These are the biggest waves I think I've ever seen. I'm going to go out and do some bodysurfing.” So, I went out there, and I waited for my wave. And, I started paddling to get on the front end of that wave. That wave picked me up, shook me, body slammed to the bottom of the beach; and friend, I just lay there. I said, “I don't want to move anything. Is my spine broken?” I'm serious. I just—under the water—I just waited there for a while. And, I moved this, and this, and my legs, and I said, “Well, at least I'm still alive,” and got up and got out of there. And, when I turned around, there was a sign I'd not seen. It said, “No bodysurfing allowed”—“no bodysurfing allowed”—“spinal injury may occur.” I walked right past that sign—never saw it, never read it. But, I have learned one thing: friend, you can't trust a wave. And, God won't trust a Christian who's like a wave of the sea. No. With a rock-like faith you ask God for wisdom, and God will give you wisdom.

Did you know that knowledge and wisdom come from God? I'm talking about godly knowledge. But, knowledge is learned from looking around; wisdom is learned from looking up. And really, you need wisdom to learn how to use knowledge. Knowledge comes by study; wisdom comes by prayer. Sometimes these young people ask me, “Pastor, pray for me—I'm having finals—that God will give me wisdom.” I say, “Son, I'll pray for you that God will help you to study.” I mean, being a Christian doesn't increase your IQ. You see, we need wisdom. Thank God for the wisdom. And friend, in trials you will learn more than you'll learn when the sun is shining.

*I walked a mile with Pleasure,
She chattered all the way;
But made me none the wiser for all she had to say.
I walked a mile with Sorrow,
Not a word said she;
But oh, the things I learned from Sorrow
When Sorrow walked with me (author unknown).*

IV. Enthronement

Fourthly, there's something else I have learned—and that is enthronement. I've learned that in difficulty, and sorrow, and pain, and perplexity, you can actually learn to live as a king during these things, not without these things. Look in chapter 1 and verse 12: *"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive"*—now, watch this—*"the crown of life"* (James 1:12). He'll be crowned. He'll become a king. Now, he's not talking about a crown when we get into Heaven. He's not talking about a crown in the future. He's talking about a crown right now. The Apostle Paul said in Romans 8, verse 17 that we are to reign in life (Romans 8:17). God wants you to have dominion over all of these things, but *you'll never learn to be over until you learn to be under* and until you endure. Without endurance, you're not going to have enthronement.

Friend, let me tell you something: if you do not bear the cross, you can't wear the crown. In life, when these things come, get under and stay under until God is finished, and God will give you the crown of life—God will enthrone you. You know, the Bible says in Proverbs chapter 25, verse 28: *"He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls"* (Proverbs 25:28). If you don't learn to rule, to be the king over your own spirit, you're like a city without walls. Enemies can come and go. But, God wants you to be a king and to rule in this life. And, if you don't learn to rule, I'm telling you, you're in danger. You're like—you're like a city whose walls are broken down.

V. Enrichment

Now, here's the fifth and final thing I want to mention that will come through trials and difficulties, and God is teaching me. I haven't—I haven't—learned everything yet, but you know something about God? He never flunks you—just re-enrolls you. He just re-enrolls you so you can learn. But, here's the next thing—enrichment. Look again in chapter 1 and verse 4: *"Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect"*—that's *teleea*, "mature"—*"and entire"*—now, watch this next phrase—*"wanting nothing"* (James 1:4). How would you like to come to the place where there's nothing you want? Well, according to this, you can come to that place.

Now, that doesn't mean you have the key to Fort Knox. *If you want to know how rich you are, add up everything that you have that money cannot buy and death cannot take away.* Then you will know just exactly how rich you are. And, God says, "If you learn to endure, I'll bring you to the place where you will need nothing." Now, the word *wanting* there does not mean "desire"; it means "necessity." There will be no necessity God isn't able, as Joyce sang this morning, to meet.

Years ago, I went out to a camp meeting back in the backwoods of Florida. I was

driving a little Volkswagen in those days, and I loved that little car. It was a great car. But, one thing about the Volkswagen in those days—it didn't have a gasoline gauge. It had two tanks; and when you ran out of gas in the first tank, you just turned a little lever and you turned on the second tank. Now, in the second tank, there was just a mite more, as I remember, of a gallon of gasoline. And so, a Volkswagen would go pretty far on a gallon of gasoline 'til you find a service station. But, I had forgotten I was already on that little tank, and we were out in the backwoods. I had a friend with me, and I said, "Oh, no—we are going to run out of gasoline. I was meaning to get gasoline before we ever came out here, and we have driven way out here; and now, we're coming back on this lonely road." I said to my friend, "Let's pray, O God, that we'll find a place—a service station." And, we prayed, and we drove and drove. And, I knew by after a while we were running on fumes, and I thought, "We're going to run out of gasoline." But, we kept on praying. And, I saw the gas station in the distance just when the car ran out of gasoline and the motor stopped. I put it into neutral, and we began to coast. No exaggeration—I coasted right to the pump—right to the pump. And, a man came out and said—that's when they were service your car; you didn't put it in self-service—and he said, "May I help you?" I said, "Yes, I'd like 75 cents worth of gasoline." That's all I had. I had given the rest to the camp meeting. I had 75 cents in my pocket.

Now, let me tell you something: God doesn't always work miracles like that for you or for me, but the thing I'm trying to illustrate is I didn't need any gas. I came right to the service station—I didn't need any gas. And, I didn't need any money because I had 75 cents. God will bring you to the place if you'll learn to trust Him. I promise you that God will be there to meet your need.

Now listen—look, if you will, in James 5, verses 7 and 8: "*Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman*"—that means "the farmer" or "the vine dresser"—"*waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and [the] latter rain*" (James 5:7). You can't hurry the harvest. God wants to give you riches, but you can't hurry the harvest.

Back in Bible times is what you call the *former rain* and the *latter rain*. Oh, it's still true over in Israel today. The former rain is in the Fall. It causes the seed to germinate. The latter rain is in the Spring that causes the grain to swell up and get ripe and ready for harvest. Now, the Bible says you've got to endure if you want the harvest (James 5:7). Do you want to be enriched? You've got to endure. The problem with many of us is that we want it now. Our forefathers would get upset if they missed a stagecoach, and they say, "Well, another one will be along in a month." We get upset today if we miss a section of a revolving door. We want it now. That's the reason why so many people are up to their ears in worshipping the god of credit. These credit cards have destroyed them. They're buying things they don't need with money they don't have to impress

people they don't like. And, there are plenty of people who will be happy to sell you those things. But, what God says—"Endure! Endure! I'll make you rich. I'll give you the real riches of life."

And so, friend, I wish I could tell you more that I've learned, but time has gone. I've learned this much, indeed, and I thank God for it. Let me just close with a line from an old song:

*When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee, I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine (John Rippon).*

Conclusion

Now, you say, "Pastor, I want to live that way. I want to be in God's school." Listen to me now: you've got to enroll—you've got to enroll. You say, "I'm in the school of hard knocks." No, that's not God's school. I'm not talking about the difficulties that all of us have in life. I'm talking about the trials—the testings—that come from God that cause us and enable us to endure.

Would you bow your heads in prayer? Heads are bowed, and eyes are closed. And, if you're not absolutely certain that you know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, I've got wonderful news for you: our Lord is knocking at your heart's door. He is closer to you than the person sitting next to you in this service. He desires to save you. He wants to save you. He will save you. He died to save you. He promised to save you if you would trust Him. The Bible says simply, and sweetly, and sublimely, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved*" (Acts 16:31). To be saved means that every sin is forgiven. To be saved means that God, through the Holy Spirit, comes into us to give us life, peace, power, purpose, and joy. And, to be saved means that when Jesus comes again or when we die, we'll go straight to Heaven.

Would you like that today? Would you like to have a personal relationship with God through Christ? Let me guide you in a prayer. And, you pray like this, silently, but fervently in your seat. And, make this prayer, if you can, your prayer, and don't just repeat the words. But, pray this way: "Dear God, I know that You love me, and I know that You want to save me. Jesus, You died to save me. You paid my sin debt on the cross with Your shed blood. Thank You for doing that, Jesus. Now, Lord Jesus, I open my life up to You. Right now, I receive You as my Lord and Master. I turn from my sinful ways to You, Lord Jesus. Come into my heart, forgive my sin, and save me, Lord Jesus." Pray that prayer and mean it. Listen, you can put it in a sentence: "save me, Lord Jesus."

Did you pray that prayer? Then, I want to suggest you pray this way: "thank You for

doing it. And, I'll not be ashamed of You because You died for me. I will make it public today. I will not be ashamed of You, Lord Jesus. Thank You for saving me."

Now, look up here. We're going to sing an invitational hymn, and the ministers of our church are going to stand here at the head of each of these aisles to welcome those of you who'll be coming forward. And, if you're in the balcony, rather than coming all the way down here, there'll be a minister under that banner over there that says, "Redeemer," and under this one in the corner that says, "Messiah." And, a friend is waiting there, a minister, to welcome you. "Well Pastor, if I prayed that prayer, what should I say when I go down there?" Why don't you just say, "I'm trusting Jesus"—"I am trusting Jesus." "Well, what will happen, Pastor?" Well, number one: We'll rejoice with you, and the Church will rejoice. Number two: We'll give you some scripture to stand on, answer any questions we can answer, and seal it in prayer. It'll take just a moment, but you'll be so grateful and glad that you did when the end of our days has come.

Now, there are others of you—you're saved and you know that you're saved, but you've never had believer's baptism. Why don't you come and say, "I want to make an appointment for my baptism"? And, we'll do that. We'll make an appointment and baptize you as a believer in Jesus Christ.

And then, there are others of you today who are saved and properly baptized, but you need a church home. Every Christian needs to be a member of a local New Testament church—if not Bellevue, one somewhere. If you're here with your wife, or husband, or by yourself and your membership is off somewhere else, I want to invite you to come and say, "I want to place my membership here." That's what you can say: "I want to place my membership here." And, we'll tell you how you may become a member of this church.

Now, let me pray one more time, and then we're going to sing. Father God, I pray that You will open the hearts of those who need to come, and grant repentance, grant understanding and even courage, dear Lord. In Your holy name. Amen. Let's stand together. You step out and come on the first stanza.

Learning to Endure

By Adrian Rogers

Sermon Date: July 11, 2004

Main Scripture Text: James 1:2–8, 12

Outline

Introduction

I. Enjoyment

II. Enlargement

III. Enlightenment

IV. Enrichment

V. Enthronement

Conclusion

Introduction

Well, it's a joy for me to wake up in the morning and see that Joyce is already up (she beats me up every morning) and to hear her singing praise to the Lord. What a joy that is to wake up! It sets my heart to thinking about the Lord with my waking moments. Would you take God's Word and turn to James chapter 1? And, when you've found it, I want you to look up here. I'll tell you what I'm going to be talking to you about today: it is "Learning to Endure."

Now, God has a school, and God will enroll you in that school; and God wants to teach you in that school how to endure. Now, this is my re-entry message. Last week was a Fourth of July message. But today, I'm going to share with you some things I have learned, when God has put me on the sidelines for a while, about learning to endure. You know, God is a strange teacher—God is a strange teacher. He gives, first of all, He gives the test, and then He gives the lesson. You get the test, and then you get the lesson. In regular school, it's just a little different. And, I'm going to share with you some things that I have learned when I've been on the sidelines.

And, I want us to look in God's Word here in James chapter 1; and look, if you will, in verse 2: "*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers*"—or "different"—"*temptations*"—now, that word *temptation* may be used as an inducement to evil, or it may be used as a test to come from God. You see, temptations to sin come from the devil to cause us to stumble; trials from God cause us to stand. So, God wants us to learn how to stay under. Now, that word *patience*... Look at that word *patience* in verse 3—"*Knowing this, that the trying*"—or "the testing"—"*of your faith [works] patience*"

(James 1:2–3). The word *patience* doesn't mean "the ability to stick with an intricate job"; the word *patience* means "to endure under whatever comes your way." It means "endurance." Every time you read *patience* there, you can read *endurance*. God wants you to learn to endure. How many of you want joy? How many of you want victory? How many of you want contentment? How many of you want satisfaction? Well, we all do, but you will never, ever learn that until you learn endurance. You have to learn to endure.

When I was back in the olden days, playing football when the Earth's crust first hardened, I can remember the first time on a football field I ever got really loose with a ball. You know, every football player dreams about that. Baseball players dream about the homerun, and basketball players dream about that last second—that last second shot. But, my dream was to run a touchdown. And, I got the ball, and things broke out. And, I was with that ball, and there was no one between me and the goal line. So, I was running, and I said, "This is my big day. I don't want to fail this. I'm going to score my first touchdown." I heard the thundering footsteps behind me, and I was running out of steam. But, I said, "I'm going to make a touchdown." And, I saw the goal line, and I dived over it. I said, "Ah-hah! I have done it." But, I hate to tell you that it wasn't the goal line; it was the five-yard line. You can't quit too soon, and you have to learn to endure. In everything in life, you have to learn to endure.

You want to learn to play the piano? You have to endure and do the scales. You want to learn Greek? You have to learn how to endure and learn the verbs and the different idiosyncrasies of the Greek language. You want to lose weight? You have to endure. All of these things in life you have to learn to endure. And now, if you want patience or endurance, what you're really calling for is tribulation. I asked you how many of you want victory, peace, joy, contentment. If I were to ask, "How many of you want tribulation?" I don't think anybody would lift their hand. But, the Bible says that we learn these things through patience or through endurance (James 1:2–3).

Now, let me tell you again that the devil will tempt you to sin to cause you to stumble; God will test you to live to cause you to stand. But, the thing is that the same word is used for an inducement to evil, *temptation*, or the testing that comes our way. And so, you have to understand what God is talking about. When the Bible says, "*Count it all joy when [you] fall into [different trials or] temptations*" (James 1:2), he's not talking about when you fall into sin. God will never tempt you with sin. As a matter of fact, look in verse 13 of this same chapter: "*Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man*" (James 1:13). God will never induce you to do evil. If He did, you would have a perfect excuse for sinning. You would say, "Well, who can resist God? What a super duper temptation that

was that came from God! And, that's the reason I gave in to it." Now, the Bible doesn't say, "If you're tempted"; it says, "When you're tempted." God is going to give you trials, and God is going to give you tests.

Now, I want to tell you some things I've learned in this recent trial. And, I want to say this in all sincerity: what I've been through is not nearly as big as what some of you are going through. And, when I talk about testings and trials, they're there, but I know that many of you are going through heartache, and anguish, and illness, and sickness, and problems, and disappointments that I'm not going through right now. So, I want to tell you now how God is going to test your faith to give you endurance.

Look, if you will, in verse 3 again: "*Knowing this, that the [testing or] the trying of your faith worketh patience*"—and not only so—"But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and [complete], wanting nothing" (James 1:3–4). And then, put in your margin Romans 5:3: "*And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation [works] patience.*" So, when you're praying for endurance and you're praying for patience, you're really praying for tribulation because what good is it to endure if you don't have anything to endure? And so, God is going to give us tribulation—and not to get us to sin, but to get us to stand. And, I'm going to teach you what I hope, this morning, what you can learn in all of this.

You see, listen—*the faith that can't be tested can't be trusted*. How do you know that you've got the real thing unless you've been tested? Would you want to fly on an airplane that had never been tested? Of course not! God wants you to have this solid faith that will pass the test so you can endure. "Well, why does God want me to endure?" Five things I want to lay on your heart this morning. Here's what you learn when you're tested—when you endure:

I. Enjoyment

Number one: enjoyment—enjoyment. Look, if you will, in James chapter 1, verse 2: "*My brethren, count it all*"—what's that next word?—"joy"—"*count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations*" (James 1:2). That doesn't mean just grin and bear it, but it means to let your heart rise in praise and prayer when we are being tested—when these trials come.

Now, Andrea Crouch said, "If I never had a problem, I wouldn't know that He could solve them." Barbara Johnson wrote a book. I can't remember what the book is about. I read it, but I remember one statement in that book that is a classic statement. She said, "Pain is inevitable, but misery is optional." Pain is inevitable. You live long enough, you're going to have some pain. As a matter of fact, most of you—you just think right now you've got one somewhere. We all have pains and sorrows. And, I don't want to

discourage you, but it's going to get worse—it's going to get worse. "Pain is inevitable, but misery is optional." *"Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations"* (James 1:2).

Now, God is going to give you a sense of enjoyment. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12, verse 10: *"I take pleasure in infirmities"* (2 Corinthians 12:10). And then, he said in 2 Corinthians 7:4: *"I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation."* So, if you are going through a battle—if there's pain, if there's sorrow, if there's disappointment—God allows that trial in your life. Don't lose your joy. The Bible says, *"Rejoice in the Lord always"* (Philippians 4:4). Always, no matter what—when you're up, when you're down, when you're sick, when you're well, when you're rich, when you're poor, when you understand or when you don't understand, rejoice in the Lord. Now, my friends, listen to me: misery is optional; to rejoice is a choice. Rejoice always. So, what is the first fruit? Enjoyment.

II. Enlargement

What is the second fruit of this temptation—this testing? It is enlargement. God wants you to grow through this. Look in James chapter 1 and verse 4: "Let patience"—that is, "endurance"—*"have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing"* (James 1:4). You say, "Pastor, is he talking about sinless when he says 'perfect'?" No, the word is the Greek word *teleios*, and it means "maturity." God wants you to be mature. And, you will not mature as God wants you to mature unless you learn to endure as God wants you to endure. God is talking about maturity. He wants you to be full-grown. *An oak tree is the maturity of an acorn. Somebody wrote these words: "And, when you're discouraged and feeling a little blue, take a look at a mighty oak and see what a nut can do."* I was reading this morning in the Word of God in Psalms chapter 4 and verse 1: God said, *"Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress"* (Psalm 4:1). You see, God helps us to grow when we're under stress. He doesn't want us to become a spiritual cream puff.

You know, do you like to eat fruit when it's sun-ripened—I mean, when it's mature? Let me tell you that the greatest fruit in the world is a mango. No, nothing else compares to a mango that has been sun-ripened. And, the best mango is a Haden mango in my humble, but accurate, opinion. And, a Haden mango is a beautiful fruit, just a little bigger than your fist. And, when it is sun-ripened, ready to be picked, it's red—orangey-red—on the top. And then, that orangey-red bleeds off into an orange color, and that melds itself down to yellow. And then, right on the tip of a mango, it's still green—or most of them. It's sort of dappled; it's just beautiful. And, to pick it up and smell it when it's sun-ripened is ecstasy; it's just wonderful. And, your nostrils dilate when you smell a sun-ripened mango. And then, you begin to feast upon it. What does it taste like? Orange? Yes. Banana? Yes. Pineapple? Yes—all of these and more. And, there's

nothing more heavenly (except going to Heaven) than to take a sun-ripened mango, and bite into it, and let the juice drip off your chin. Now, most of the mangos we get in the stores are not sun-ripened. They're picked green so they can ship them. Now, I want to say this—I want to say two things here: if you don't like mangos, that's fine with me. That just means there are more to me—more for me; and number two, if you are some of those dear people who send me mangos and you get them in the store, don't stop, because those are good. But, they are not like a sun-ripened mango.

Now, let me say something else: the problem with many Christians is they are not Sun-ripened—S-O-N. They have not learned to endure; and, therefore, they are not mature because they have not learned the lesson of testing and trials. We see this sometimes with a young preacher who is especially gifted. He's not mature. But, sometimes, because he's gifted, they put him out on the speaking circuit—and I can tell you the names of some of them. And, they go from conference to conference with their little handful of sermons; and then they fall, and they fall miserably. That's the reason the Bible says when you're ordaining a man, don't ordain a *“novice, lest [he be] lifted up with pride and fall into the condemnation of the devil”* (1 Timothy 3:6). Do you want to be mature—I mean, spiritually mature? You will never be mature without some trials and some tests.

III. Enlightenment

Now, here's the third thing: not only enjoyment, and not only enlargement, but God wants you to have enlightenment. God wants to teach you some things that He could never teach you apart from trials, heartaches, and disappointments. Look, if you will, in James 1, verses 4 through 8: *“But let patience have her perfect work”—that is, “let endurance have her maturing work”—“that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. [And] if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth”—now, watch this—“is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all [of] his ways”* (James 1:4–8).

Now, right in the middle of Paul talking about testing, he talks about wisdom, and he says, “If you want wisdom, I give you an unqualified promise that you can have wisdom if you will ask me and ask in faith, because I'm promising it.” And, he's telling us this in the middle of trials and tribulations. Now, when we are in trials and tribulations, the first question that comes to us is, “Why?” “God, why are You letting this happen to me?” Well, maybe you're so special that God can only trust you with this kind of trouble. But friend, let me tell you something: the answer is not, “Why?” The answer is *Who*.

Job was troubled. He was perplexed. He tried to find out, “God, why, why, why?” God didn’t answer him. Then, he had some friends—so-called comforters—who came to him, and they tried to tell him why. But, God said, “You’re just telling a lie. You’re not telling why Job is suffering.” Now, we all know because we read the Book of Job, but Job had never read the Book of Job. So, he’s asking God, “Why?” And finally, God finally comes to speak to Job. You know, Job had kind of challenged God. He said, in effect, “I’d like to drag You into court”—saying that to God. He said, “I would like to get You. I would like to reason with You. I’d like to argue with You. I want to know why.” Finally, God begins to speak to Job. But, He doesn’t answer Job’s questions; He asks Job a lot of questions. He asked Job questions that nobody could answer. And, Job finally understood that he doesn’t have to understand, and he stopped asking, “Why?” and learned *Who*. He learned to look at God.

Now, in your trials, if you can understand it, I’m happy for you. But, if you don’t understand it, don’t die with *why*. Begin to look to the Lord and let it draw you closer to Him, even if you don’t understand, because folks, “*the [testing] of your faith worketh patience*” (James 1:3). It’s a mark of growth when you stop asking, “Why?” and start understanding *Who*.

You know, a good counselor is not a person who answers all your questions for you—a good counselor is not a person who answers all your questions for you. This man over here is a counselor. A good counselor is a person who brings you to God—who brings you to God—helps you to learn to trust in Him, even when you don’t understand. Now, you know, you can have a PhD in chemistry and still not understand. This wisdom comes from God. And, you ask God in the prayer of faith, and God will give you wisdom—God will give you wisdom that transcends knowledge. But, he said, “If you don’t ask in faith, you’re like a wave of the sea driven with the wind—tossed, unstable” (James 1:6). Nothing more unstable than a wave. You can’t trust a wave.

Joyce and I had one of those rare occasions to be in Hawaii. And, you know, my blood is about 75% salt water, and I love the ocean—I really do. And, I said to Joyce, “Joyce, look at those waves. Just look at that! I’ve never seen such wonderful waves.” I said, “Joyce, I’m going to go out and do some bodysurfing.” That’s surfing without a surfboard. You just get just right; you catch the wave, and you can go all the way to shore. And so, I said, “You sit up here and watch me.” So, I got out there. These were glorious waves. And, I saw a wave coming. And, you’ve got to get started fast enough so that you can catch it on the downside. Timing is everything in catching a wave like that. And so, I saw my wave. I got myself positioned. That wave picked me up and slammed me on the ocean floor—I mean, slammed me. I lay there in the water. I wouldn’t move my arms, my legs. “Am I going to see if my spine is broken? Do my

hands work? Do my legs work?” I moved this one, that one. Still in the water...you know, just... And, I said, “Well, I think I’m whole.” And, I came up out of the water, up out of there as fast as I could—didn’t try another wave. When I got out there, I turned around and I saw a sign on the beach. It said, “No bodysurfing. Spinal injury may occur.” You know, we get in trouble—don’t we?—when we just don’t read the signs? But, the point of the matter is a wave is something you don’t put your trust in. Put your trust in God. Don’t waver. *“A double minded man is unstable in all [of] his ways”* (James 1:8).

Now, *knowledge comes by looking around; wisdom comes by looking up*. And, if you’re in some difficulty, you don’t have to understand why if God will give you enough wisdom to ask, “Who?”

IV. Enrichment

Now, I want to mention another gift of trials and temptations, and that is enrichment—enrichment. Look, if you will, in James chapter 1 and verse 4: *“But let patience have her perfect work”—that is, “let endurance have her maturing work”—“that ye may be perfect”—mature—“and entire”—now watch—“wanting nothing”—“wanting nothing”* (James 1:4). “Oh,” you say, “I’d like to come to a place where there’s nothing else that I want because I’ve got it all.” Well, he’s not talking here about the key to Fort Knox. He’s not talking here about your being a billionaire so that you can have every toy that you want. When he uses the word “wanting nothing,” it literally means that you have no need that He cannot meet. He is able, as Joyce sang, more than able to accomplish that which concerns you. And, you can say, “There’s nothing that I need—nothing I need—that I do not have in the Lord Jesus Christ.” Now, we’re talking about, therefore, when we’re talking about enrichment, we’re talking about true riches. *You want to know how rich you are? You add up everything that you have that money cannot buy and death cannot take away*. Then you’ll know how rich you are.

Proverbs 13, verse 7: *“There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: [and] there is that maketh himself poor, [and] yet hath great riches”* (Proverbs 13:7). Now, God wants to enrich you so you have no needs. Now, a lot of times we think we have needs. You say, “You know, I don’t have a big enough bank account. I don’t have enough food” or whatever. Well, do you really have a need if you’ve got anything in the bank? Do you need food if there’s still something on the shelf? You think about it.

I’d gone to a camp meeting back in my earlier ministry days, and I had bought a Volkswagen. I loved that little car. It was a great little car. And, I’d gone out with a friend to the camp meeting and was coming back. They had a big offering. I gave everything in my pockets to the offering except 75 cents. And, I would have given that, but I didn’t

know it was in there. And, we were driving back. Now, let me tell you about that Volkswagen. Back in those days, a Volkswagen did not have a gas gauge. It had a big tank and a small tank. And, when you filled up the big tank, the small tank got full. But, when the big tank got empty, the small tank was still there. And, you would just turn the lever, and it began to run on the small tank. And, it would run 30, 40, 50 miles on that small tank, so you would have enough time to go to a gasoline station within 40 or 50 miles and get some gasoline. Problem: I was already on the small tank when I went out to the camp meeting, and I forgot I was on the small tank.

Coming back, it dawned on me that I had run that automobile all around and I'd not gotten any gasoline. I computed in my mind how far we had come. I told my friend who was with me, "Listen, we'd better pray. We are going to run out of gasoline. Pray that we will find a gasoline station. Pray." And, we kept driving—not a station in sight. We kept driving, and driving, and driving, and driving, and I said, "We're burning fumes." And, it stopped—just stopped running. And, I looked up just about as far as from here to the balcony or a little further, and there was the first gasoline station. I put the car in neutral. We began to coast. Friend, I kid you not, we coasted right to the pump—right to the pump. You know, I didn't need any gas—I did not need any gas. God brought me right to the pump. The man came out (this was when they would service your car), and he said, "Can I help you?" I said, "Yeah, I want 75 cents worth of gas." That's all I had, but I didn't need any money because I had 75 cents. I didn't need any gas.

Now, I'm not saying that God's going to work a gasoline miracle for you. Most of us would like for Him to do that in these days. But, what I'm saying not only illustrates that we come to the place where we want nothing, when we learn to trust God, and God's resources are there. God is never, ever wringing His hands, saying, "What am I going to do?" And so, I love this song that says

When through fiery trials thy pathways shall lie,
My grace [listen to this word] my grace, all sufficient, shall be thy
supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee [that is the test]; I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine (John Rippon).

V. Enthronement

Now folks, I want to tell you something: if you're being tested now, God's plan for you is enjoyment, God's plan for you is enlargement, God's plan for you is enlightenment, and finally, God's plan for you is enthronement. God wants you to live as a king in this world and in this life.

Now, let me give you another part of this wonderful, wonderful Word here. God says

that we are to reign as kings—James 1:12: *“Blessed is that man that [endures] temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”* Would you like to live as a king? You say, “Well, that’s the crown you get when you go to Heaven.” No, it’s a crown of life. The Apostle Paul says, *“[We] reign in life”* (Romans 5:17). Would you like to be the conqueror in all of this? Learn to endure. If you don’t learn to endure, you’re not going to be enriched. And, you can’t wear the crown if you don’t bear the cross.

Conclusion

Bow you heads in prayer. Heads are bowed, and eyes are closed. Now, you say, “Pastor Rogers, I’m in the school of hard knocks.” I’m not talking about the school of hard knocks. I’m talking about the testing that comes from God. And, you cannot get into this school if you’re not enrolled. And, you get enrolled when you get saved. Would you like to be enrolled? Would you like to come under God’s providential care? Would you like for God to turn your hurts into hallelujahs and your tears into telescopes? Would you like that? Receive Christ as your personal Savior. I would want to know the Lord Jesus Christ even if there were not a Heaven nor a Hell—there is both—but to know Him in this life. Now folks, if you want Jesus, I’m going to lead you in a prayer. And, I promise you on the authority of the Word of God that God will save you where you are instantaneously, right now—right in your seat God will save you. Not only will God save you instantaneously, but God will keep you eternally. And, if you will allow Him, He will satisfy you fully.

Now, would you like to pray and be saved? I want you to pray this prayer, and I don’t want you to pray it because I say it; I want you to pray out of your heart this prayer. Pray to God. Just as Joyce said sing to God, you pray to God right now. Forget that anybody else is here. You want to get it settled. You want to do business with God. You want to say an everlasting “yes” to Him. Then, here’s the way: I want you to pray—pray this way: “Dear God, I know that You love me, and I know that You want to save me. Jesus, You died on a cross to save me. You shed Your blood to pay my sin debt. And, You said if I would trust You, You would save me. I do trust You, Lord Jesus. This very moment, I open my heart. I receive You into my life not only as my Savior, but as my Lord. Take control of my life now and begin to make me the person You want me to be. I trust You, Jesus, to save me. Save me, Lord Jesus.” Now, you may not remember all of that prayer, but you can put it in a sentence: “Save me, Lord Jesus.” Did you ask Him? Were you sincere? Were you? Then, by faith, pray this way: “Thank You for doing it. I receive it by faith, and now You’re my Lord, my Savior, my Master forever. I love You, Jesus.” And then, pray this: “Lord Jesus, help me never to be ashamed of You.

Give me the courage, and the strength, and the obedience to make it public. In Your name I pray. Amen.”

Now, look up here. Why did I ask you to pray that last phrase—“give me the courage and the strength to be obedient and to make it public”? Now, you’re not saved by walking down a church aisle—obviously not. And, you prayed in your seat—you’re as saved as you will ever be if you really meant business. Well, you say, “Pastor, how can I know if I meant business?” Well now, you listen—if you will not make it public, you ought to have some real doubts as to whether you were sincere, because the Bible says when we believe on Jesus, we will not be ashamed of Him. So, I want to say this: *the faith that will not lead to confession will not lead to Heaven*. You’re not saved by walking down a church aisle or shaking a preacher’s hand. You’re saved when you give your heart to the Lord Jesus Christ. But, one of the true signs that you mean business with God is that you’re willing to make it public. And, we’re going to give you an opportunity to do that—to do that right now.

We’re going to have a minister stand at the head of each of these aisles; and in a moment, we’re going to stand a sing a song. And, if you prayed and asked Christ in your heart, I want you, as quickly as you can, to make your way to the aisle and down here to the front. A minister of the gospel will be standing at the head of each of these aisles to welcome you. For those of you in the balcony, a man of God will be standing under that banner over there that says, “Redeemer,” or this one over here that says, “Messiah.” And, you just make your way there. Somebody is waiting to receive you.

“Pastor, what should I say when I come down there?” Well, you can say whatever you want, but may I suggest that you may say, “I’m trusting Jesus—I am trusting Jesus”? “Well, what will happen?” Well, we’ll rejoice. We’ll give you some scripture to stand on, answer any questions. We’ll take you to a quiet place very near the auditorium for just a moment, and pray with you, and rejoice with you. It’ll take just a moment. It can be the greatest thing that you’ve ever done. We will deal with you courteously, and kindly, and forthrightly. And oh, we’re so excited about those of you who’ll be coming to say “yes” to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Others of you have never been baptized as a believer in Christ. You’re saved and you know it, but there’s something missing. You’re not obedient. Baptism is not incidental; it is fundamental to living the Christian life. So, some of you need to come this morning and say to the minister, “Look, I know I’m saved, but I want to make an appointment for my baptism.” And, we will make a mutually agreeable time where you can be baptized.

Others of you today have been saved and baptized. Your membership is elsewhere. This is where you worship, where God speaks to your heart. I want you to come and

say to the minister, “I want to place my membership here.” Husbands and wives can come together and do that. Many times, a membership is off somewhere else and you’ve moved to Memphis. You need to come down this aisle and say, “I want to place my membership here.” Now, listen to me—every born-again child of God needs to be a member of a local New Testament church—if not Bellevue, one somewhere.

So, some are coming, saying, “I’m trusting Christ.” Others are coming, saying, “I want to make an appointment for my baptism.” Others are coming, saying, “I want to place my membership here.” If you have questions, you come anyway. We can answer those questions. Let’s stand together. You step out and come on the first stanza.

The Way of Wisdom

By Adrian Rogers

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Main Scripture Text: James 1:5–7

Sponsored by: Sponsor

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”

JAMES 1:5

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Introduction

Turn, please, to James chapter 1, would you please. And I want us to think a little bit on the subject of wisdom – what it is and what it is not and how to have it. James chapter 1. Notice, if you would please, a very wonderful promise, verse 5: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth (or scoldeth) not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. Let not that man think he shall receive anything of the Lord.”

Beyond any shadow of doubt or peradventure or surmising, I can say, again without hesitation, stutter, or stammer, the great need of the hour is for wisdom – individual wisdom, family wisdom, church wisdom, national wisdom. We are floundering in a sea of ignorance, and we need wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to see life, to see the situation from God’s viewpoint.

Many of the things that we think are important are not all that important. Wisdom is far more important than wealth. The Bible says in Proverbs 3, verses 13 and following:

“Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding, for the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver and the gain thereof than fine gold. She (wisdom that is) is more precious than rubies and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared with her.” All the wealth in the world is not equal to the value of wisdom.

Not only is wisdom more to be desired than wealth; it’s more to be desired than might – military power, as well as monetary power. Ecclesiastes chapter 9 and verse 16: “Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength....” It’s better to be wise than it is to be strong. He goes on to say in verse 18, “Wisdom is better than the weapons of war...” Far better it would be for those on Capitol Hill to be wise than those in the Pentagon to be strong.

Wisdom is more important than education. There’s a difference between education and wisdom. Proverbs chapter 4, beginning in verse 4: “He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live. Get wisdom, get understanding; forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her (that is, love wisdom – that’s the first girl a boy ought to court, ha, ha, wisdom), love her and she shall keep thee.” Now listen to the word of God. “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: with all thy getting get understanding.”

Now wisdom is linked to knowledge, but wisdom is not the same as knowledge. You can get knowledge from the university; you may not get wisdom from the university. Knowledge, so many times, is proud that it knows so much. Wisdom is truly humbled that it knows so little. Knowledge is needed to pass the test in school. Wisdom is needed to pass the tests of life. Knowledge is learned, but wisdom is the supernatural gift of God. Knowledge comes by looking around. Wisdom comes by looking up into the face of God. Knowledge comes by study, but wisdom comes by education. Now wisdom teaches one to apply the knowledge that he has. I’m not, I’m not opposed to knowledge, but knowledge will always fail without wisdom.

When you think of the smartest man, other than Solomon, a man of our lifetime, who do you think of? Why, I think of Einstein. He died in 1955. And before he died, Einstein said this: These are sad words, poignant words, but listen to them. This is what the great, brilliant Einstein said: He said, “I feel like a man chained. If I could only be freed from the shackles of my intellectual smallness.” That’s what Einstein said. “If I could only be freed from the shackles of my intellectual smallness, then I could understand the universe in which I live.” May I tell you, my dear friend, that a boy or girl in Bellevue’s Sunday school will have greater understanding of the universe in which we live through a study of the word of God than the great Einstein could have apart from the world of God.

You know what the Bible says? The Bible says in 1st Corinthians chapter 1, verses 20 and 21: “Where is the wise? Where is the scribe...?” Now the scribes were the intellectual top waters of their day. “...Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world?” (That means, where is the philosopher). “...hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” And oh, how true that is. Folks, if we’re so wise, why are we in the mess we’re in? Where is the wisdom of this world? “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God...” God is so wise that He will not allow you by your human ingenuity and wisdom to know Him. If He did, then the Einsteins, the Ph.D., and the Bob Sorrells would have a head start. But, you see, my dear friend, God is so wise that He will not let you come to Him head first. You have to come heart first. And so, listen to it. “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” Now it doesn’t say by foolish preaching, but by what the world calls foolishness. That is, the preaching of the cross. And I’m saying to you that a boy or a girl in our Sunday school will have more true wisdom than many who pour over the tomes in the libraries of this city and of this world.

I. The Problem

Now let me speak to you a little bit, first of all, about a problem and then I want to tell you what to do with that problem. Look, if you will, in verse 5: “If any of you lack wisdom...” Now that is the problem. All of us, from time to time, lack wisdom. We need to be able to have God’s viewpoint on something. We need to be able to see the situation from the viewpoint of the Almighty. That is the problem.

II. The Promise

But thank God, with the problem there comes a promise. Look at it again. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” That’s a promise that I claim constantly, and I thank God that promise is there. It literally says – let him ask the giving God. He’s not the God of the clenched fist. He is the God that gives to all men liberally and scolds not. When you ask God for wisdom, He’s not going to say to you, “I’ll not give you wisdom.” Or, if He gives it to you one time, He’ll not scold you for coming again. The Bible says that He will give you wisdom and He will give it liberally.

Now He’s not going to give you knowledge; He’s going to give you wisdom. There’s a difference. If you’ve got an examination next Tuesday, young person in school, ha, it won’t do you any good to sit down and say, “Now, God, give me knowledge when I take this test.” If you don’t study, He’s not going to zap you with it. God will give you wisdom that’ll teach you to study. But God gives you wisdom. He’s going to give it liberally and

out of His infinite riches in Jesus He giveth and giveth and giveth again.

Now here is a problem – a lack of wisdom. Here is a promise – I will give it. I will give it liberally. I won't scold you.

III. The Prayer

But now, here's the prayer. He tells you how to ask for wisdom. Look again, if you will, in verse 5: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not: and it shall be given him." But here's the prayer: Watch it. "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed." God invites you to pray. Ha, somebody I saw a slogan the other day. It said, "Why pray when you can worry." Ha, ha. Well, my dear friend, they were being precocious. God invites you not to wring your hands, but to bend your knees.

Now the devil, the devil cannot keep God from answering, so you know what the devil will do? He'll keep you from asking. He'll keep you from asking, ha, if you'll let him. But he says, "Let him ask..." That, my dear friend, is the freedom to pray, but also there is the faith to pray. "But let him ask in faith..." Hebrews 11:6: "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he that cometh to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Whatever you pray for, if you don't pray with faith, you have no expectation of getting your prayer answered. Pray, believe, you'll receive. Pray and doubt, you'll do without. It's just that simple. "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering..." Now, my friend, I told you just recently about the prayer of faith, last Sunday night, I believe, and I said in order to pray the prayer of faith, you must have a word from God. If you're just guessing at the will of God, you can't pray with faith. But here is something that you can always pray with faith about, always. You can say, "God, I know that it is Your will that I have wisdom. Therefore, I don't have to stutter. I don't have to stammer. I can pray in faith and expect You to hear my prayer." There's the freedom to pray, the faith to pray, but now watch it. There's the firmness in your prayers. "But let him ask in faith (verse 6), nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. Let not that man think he will receive anything of the Lord." Don't be double-minded. Be single-minded. Actually, the word double-minded means two soul. That's literally what it means. You're sort of a spiritual schizophrenic. If your eye is single, your body will be full of light. When you come to God, and you say, "Lord, You invited me to pray. I'm standing on Your word. I will not be denied. I will not drift to and fro, nothing wavering! I ask you for faith, and I believe You for faith."

IV. The Pattern

So we've seen the problem. We've seen the promise. We've seen a prayer. But now let's tighten the focus and see a pattern. What is this wisdom going to be like? Well, fast forward to James chapter 3 and James picks up the subject of wisdom again. James chapter 3 and begin in verse 13. Now James is going to describe this wisdom that he's talking about. "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitten envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above (that is, the wisdom that God gives in answer to prayer) is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."

A. The Goodness of Wisdom

Now God gives us a pattern for wisdom. Look in verse 13. He says that this wisdom is showed by goodness. Look at it. The Bible says, "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conversation his works..." Now good conversation literally means good behavior.

Do you know what every wise person is like? His life is filled with practical goodness. You see, real wisdom shows up not only in the mind; it shows up in the life. Not only in your words, but in your works.

B. The Gentleness of Wisdom

Not only is it marked by goodness, verse 13, but gentleness. Look at it again. It is, "...let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom." Arrogance and wisdom are not found in the same person. Arrogant wisdom is as phony as a three dollar bill. We are to be a wise man, not a wise guy. And I like what the little girl prayed when she prayed, "Lord, make all of the bad people good, and all the good people nice." Friend, goodness and gentleness, according to verse 13, goodness and gentleness, goodness and gentleness, goodness and gentleness – these are the marks of true wisdom.

C. The Distortion of Wisdom

And in case we still don't understand it, he shows us the other side of the coin, this devilish wisdom, this distortion of wisdom. Look in verse 14: "But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, and devilish."

1. Earthly

Now there is a type of wisdom, devilish wisdom, that causes envy, it causes strife, it causes confusion. Every church has people who have this kind of wisdom. I've seen them in every church I've pastored. These are people who are wise to do evil. Many times they're theologians. Ha, ha. They can split a theological hair into sixteen equal sections. They know all of the Greek. They know all of the Hebrew. But they don't know God. They are wise, but they are wise to do evil, and they cause all kinds of problems in the churches.

Look, if you will, in verse 15 where this wisdom comes from. "This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, and devilish." Now there are the three sources. First of all, it's from the world and it's worldly. That's what he means when he says it is earthly. That is, it did not come from above.

Do you know where many pastors make mistakes and many churches make mistakes? They find some worldly wise, high muckety-muck and they put him on a committee to lead a committee, or they make a deacon out of him, or they make some sort of a church leader out of him because he's worldly wise. May I tell you the same wisdom that he has to help you is the same wisdom he'll use to hurt you later on.

The source of this devilish wisdom, number one, is from the world. And number two, it's from the flesh. Not only is from the world and worldly, but it's from the flesh and it is fleshy. Look again in verse 15: "This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly..."

2. Sensual

And then it is sensual. Do you see the word sensual? Now that means that here's a person who lives by his wits. What he calls wisdom some people call common sense. Wisdom and common sense are not the same, my dear friend. Common sense comes from within. Wisdom comes from above. I'm not opposed to common sense, but I'm telling you, my dear friend, that there are people who are sensual and they live by their senses and they know not God. Jude 19 says, "These be they who separate themselves sensual, having not the Spirit." Rather than living by the Spirit of God, they live by their senses.

3. Devilish

It comes from the world and it's worldly. It comes from the flesh and it's fleshy. And it comes from the devil and it is devilish. Look in verse 15. It is earthly, sensual, and devilish. There's a lot of wisdom that is inspired from hell.

I have on my desk a stack of papers sent to me from somebody in a church in Texas. And in that church in Texas, these people have taken it upon themselves to oppose the leadership of that church. And they spent a dollar and forty something cents

worth of postage to send me some mail vilifying their pastor. I suppose there are twenty pages in there, little details. That individual has sat out there in that congregation, and every time the pastor would say something that they could twist or whatever, they copied it down and wrote it down. I thought to myself, *What a blessing they must have gotten in church.* But as I read all of that, I said to myself, *The person who did this is full of the devil, just full of the devil.* Anybody with any spiritual discernment could see the power of Satan working in that person's mind. And as you would know, it was unsigned. Well, I would love to answer it. By the way, every now and then I get an unsigned letter from some of you. Some of them are sweet and some of them are not. But I'm a sweet person. Go ahead and sign your name. Go ahead and sign your name. So that'll give me a chance to say something back to you out of my heart, because sometimes I get letters from people and the people really do not understand. They might say things. Friend, just go ahead and sign your name, because I'm not an angry person. I'd love to have a letter from you that I could respond to out of my heart. But this was an unsigned letter. And, very frankly, the person who wrote this letter was very full of the devil.

I heard about a preacher one time who dressed up in a devil's suit – you know, the, the typical caricature of the devil, with the horns, the red, underwear, and the forked tail and the pitchfork. And he walked up and down in front of the church with a placard, saying, "Do not attend this church." It was his way of advertising the church. He thought that would be funny and humorous and people would see the devil out there, saying, "Don't go to this church," and maybe they would go to that church. Well, friend, I want to tell you I don't think it was all that wise for that preacher to disguise himself as a devil. But I know something even more sinister than that. The devil often disguises himself as a preacher. And when you look for the devil, don't fail to look in the pulpits. Satan himself is transformed as an angel of light. And what I'm trying to say is there is a devilish wisdom. It is worldly and from the world. It is fleshly and from the flesh. It is devilish and from the devil.

Conclusion

But what is this wisdom that we can pray and ask God for? Well, let's look in verse 17. Here is the pattern. "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure..." Wisdom overcomes sin. It is pure. Nothing impure ever comes from God, and nothing impure can ever be called wise. If your life is filled with impurity, your heart is not filled with wisdom. If you are a reader of pornography, you're not a wise person. If you are a listener to gossip or a purveyor of gossip, you're not a wise person. If you're dishonest in your business dealings, you are not wise. This wisdom is pure. It overcomes sin. Number two: It is peaceable, so it overcomes strife. The Bible says it's first pure, and then peaceable.

Now a person who is full of wisdom is easily entreated and easy to get along with. I know people who use the Bible like a club rather than a sword. It's a wonderful sword. It's a poor club. And a person who is wise is not the person who generates church fusses and division.

But not only does it overcome sin and overcome strife; it overcomes stubbornness. Look again. It's, "...gentle and easy to be entreated..." True wisdom is not rigid. It's not inflexible. There's a sweet reasonableness about true wisdom. True wisdom is easy to be around.

Have you ever known folks that are just hard to be around? Oh, they seem to be brilliant. I call them porcupine Christians. They have a lot of good points; you just can't get near 'em, ha. There's a sweet reasonableness about real wisdom. It is gentle, easy to be entreated.

It overcomes sin. It overcomes strife. It overcomes stubbornness. It overcomes selfishness. Continue to read. The Bible says here that it is, "...full of mercy and good works..." A wise person is not a self-centered person. Ha, there's nothing so empty as a self-centered life and nothing so centered as a self-emptied life. A wise person is not a person who is on an ego trip, but a wise person is a person who loves to help and serve other people.

But not only does it overcome selfishness; it overcomes snobbishness. Look again as what he says here. It is "...without partiality..." Without partiality. If you're a snob, if you're a respecter of persons, if there is in you racial pride, if you're a racist, if there is in you economic pride, materialist, if there is in you intellectual pride, if you are an elitist, you don't know anything about true wisdom. It's without partiality. Real wisdom sees every man from God's point of view, and to every man, from God's point of view every man is precious. Every man is precious. If there are people that you look down upon, you're not a wise person.

And it overcomes not only snobbishness, but it overcomes, last of all, sham and shamfulness. Look, if you will, in the last word in verse 17: "...without hypocrisy." The word hypocrite comes from the world of drama, and it means a play actor. In Jesus' time, the actors would put a mask on their face. If they were to be happy, they'd put a happy mask on. If they were to be sad, they'd put a sad mask on. And they played, they call those actors on the stage hypocrites. And Jesus just picked up that word and said, "Your churchianity is just a game that you're playing. You are a hypocrite." A wise man never has to masquerade. He can take off the mask and be what he wants to be.

Now the fruit of all of this wisdom is peace. Look, if you will, in verse 18: "And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."

Well, are you a wise person? Friend, wisdom begins by receiving Christ. It commences with conversion. That when you receive Jesus Christ, you received

everything that you need. Well, the Bible tells us in 1st Corinthians that Christ is made unto us wisdom and redemption and sanctification. When you receive Christ, you receive wisdom. But you know what else we told you? That the Christian life is discovering and developing what you already have, discovering it and developing it. So it commences with conversion. But, oh, my dear friend, it develops with discipleship. Get into the word of God. Study the word of God. And then, it is promised through prayer. If you lack wisdom, just ask God. Say, "God, give me wisdom. Show me what to do." And don't be afraid. Thank Him that He's heard your prayer. Oh, what a wonderful, wonderful promise.

Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. Father, I thank You for this promise of wisdom tonight. And I pray, Lord, that You'll help us to lean on it, to learn from it, to trust in it, and to be truly wise people. In Jesus' name, amen.

A Man and His Money

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: June 11, 1978

Main Scripture Text: James 1:9–12

“But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.”

JAMES 1:10

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Introduction

James chapter 1 and verse 9—we’re speaking today on this subject: “A Man and His Money”: *“Let the brother of a low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried”—and that word means “tested”—“he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (James 1:9–12).*

Now, we’ve been talking about passing the test of life, and you will remember the messages that we’ve already preached on the Book of James—how that we all have

many trials and many temptations that come to prove us and to test us. And, one of the biggest tests of what we are and one of the biggest tests of a man's character is his relationship to money and material things. And, you can almost tell a something about a man all the way through his life if you find his attitude and his action toward money and his reaction toward money. Sometimes you have to watch the reaction.

I heard of grandpa who won 100,000 dollars in the sweepstakes, and they were afraid to tell him because he had a weak heart. And, they thought that it just might do him in; and so, they asked the pastor if the pastor would tell him. The pastor, they said, had a way with words; and so, the pastor sat on the front porch, and rocked with grandpa for a while, and then just casually said, "Grandpa, what would you do with a 100,000 dollars if you had it?" "Why," he said, "that would be easy. I'd give it all to the church." And, the pastor fell dead.

Now, so, our reaction to money... You know, there a lot of deceptions about money—a lot of misconceptions about money, illusions about money.

A. People Believe Money Will Buy Happiness

Some people believe that money will bring happiness, and I dare say that most of the people who are listening to me today believe that. Even many of you who are here believe that money would make you happy, but, of course, it won't. And, if you think long enough, you know that it will not. Money can't buy happiness. It can buy marriage, but it can't buy love. It can buy four years in college, but it can't buy an education. Money can hire a doctor, but it can't make you well. Money can take you almost anywhere except to Heaven and buy almost anything except happiness. Other people have the idea that money means security—you know, if they just had enough money, they would be secure. There's no security in money, because the Bible speaks of "*the deceitfulness of riches*" (Mark 4:19), and these things can be wiped away so easily.

I was witnessing to a man down in Fort Lauderdale, trying to bring him to Christ. He's a very wealthy businessman. He'd made a pot-full of money in real estate. I suppose he was worth several millions of dollars. And, this man, as we were there in the coffee shop, said, "May I tell you something, very frankly?" I said, "Yes." He said, "You're trying to get me to be a Christian. But, I want to tell you, sir, I have everything I need." And, I said, "May I tell you something, very frankly?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Just one air bubble hits your brain—you'll become a slobbering idiot. You don't realize just how fragile your life is." Oh, how many people think that money is security!

B. People Believe Money Is Evil

There's another illusion about money: some people think that money is evil. Now, the Bible doesn't say that money is evil. The Bible says, "*The love of money is a root of all [kinds of] evil*" (1 Timothy 6:10), and indeed it is. The love of money has brought

disaster to many a home in Memphis, Tennessee, and in America, and so much heartbreak. I was interested in doing some research on this message, and I found out, according to one marriage counselor, who is supposed to be an expert, that 89% of all family discord is related to money in some way or another. And then, he went on to say that all of the divorces in America—of all of the divorces in America—his estimate is that 80% have money mismanagement at the base. Think of it—80%. Now, when we say...perhaps sex, or alcohol, or selfishness, but according to this man: finances, money. You know, that can ruin a good marriage. “Theirs was a beautiful marriage, but for one feminine flaw: he was good on the deposit, but she was faster on the draw.” And, that has happened to many a marriage.

And so, we want to find something about a proper attitude toward money, and the message today is going to be dealing primarily with attitude, because attitude is the key. It is attitude and not circumstances that determines a family’s general financial stability. And, the experience of a thousand years has proven that *the family that cannot manage on little cannot manage on much*. And, you have the idea, perhaps, if you could get a new job, if you could get a raise, if you get some more money, that perhaps then your problems would be ended. But, so often a raise in salary or a new position just opens the gate to wider expenditures and deeper debt.

Now, as James is speaking to us about a man and his money—or, if you ladies feel left out, a woman and her money—he mentions three key things. First of all, I want you think of the word *exaltation*. Notice in verse 9: “*Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted*” (James 1:9). The next word is *humiliation*: “*But the rich, in that he is made low*” (James 1:10). And, the third word is *coronation*—verse 12: “*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life*” (James 1:12). That’s coronation. And so, let’s notice around those three words.

I. The Exaltation of the Poor Man

First of all, think with me, if you will, about the exaltation—the exaltation—of the poor man. Verse 9: “*Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted*” (James 1:9). You see, in order to pass the test of life, one test that many may have to pass is the test of poverty. And, all of this is in the context of passing the test of life—getting an A+ rather than a zero, as we talked about last Sunday. And, in order for you to pass the test, you may be tried with poverty; and if you’re tried with poverty, the Lord has some advice for you: if you are a brother of low degree (that means someone who is impoverished), you ought to see your poverty in the proper perspective, because in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are highly exalted no matter how poor you are. You, my friend, if you are a Christian, are richer than Onassis, richer than Howard Hughes, richer than the richest man on the face of the earth without the Lord Jesus Christ. As a Christian, you

have gone from rags to riches.

Now, I want you to just jot these verses out alongside verse 9, if you will. Romans 8, verses 16 and 17—listen to it: “[For] the Spirit [Himself] beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:16–17). Isn’t that wonderful? A man was showing me his lavish estate, and I said, “Well, that’s beautiful, but you ought to see my brother’s place.” And, he showed me something else, and I said, “That’s beautiful, but you ought to see my brother’s place.” And, after a while, he said, “Who is your brother?” I said, “The Lord Jesus Christ.” Oh, listen—we’re joint-heirs with Jesus—heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.

Listen to this; jot this verse down alongside that verse—2 Corinthians chapter 8 and verse 9: “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). And then, I want you to jot this verse down—1 Corinthians 1, verse 5: “in every thing ye are enriched by him” (1 Corinthians 1:5). Let me give you a good illustration of that. Turn in the Old Testament, please, to 2 Samuel for a moment. Now, I want to show you something here that is one of the best illustrations of the riches of the redeemed that I know anywhere in the Bible—2 Samuel chapter 9.

And, while you’re finding that, let me just tell you a story. King David and a man named Jonathan were very close friends, This was before David became king. At this particular time, Jonathan’s father, Saul, was the king. Now, Saul hated King David, but Jonathan and David were very close friends. Saul died, and Jonathan died also; and David came to the throne. Now, Jonathan had a son, who was a grandson of Saul, whose name was Mephibosheth, and Mephibosheth was crippled. A nurse had dropped him when he was a little baby, fleeing in terror. When the kingdom was turned over to David, she dropped this little baby boy, and his legs were crippled; and now, this baby boy, who has the unusual name of Mephibosheth, has grown up to a young man. But, he’s living on the backside of the desert—just in the backside of nowhere. He’s breathing dust, eating from a tin cup, living in a little dingy hideout, as it were. And, King David comes, and King David says, “Is there...any left of the house of Saul...?” (2 Samuel 9:1).

Well, everybody quaked in their boots, because they thought that the purge was going to begin—that David was going to exterminate any body that might be left of his enemy Saul. But, this is what David said: “Is there...any left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” (2 Samuel 9:1). And, it becomes one of the greatest illustrations of the New Testament wealth that we have in Christ. For God has shown us kindness for Jesus’s sake, you know. And so, that is such a beautiful picture. And so, Mephibosheth sees David coming. He drags his dead limbs behind him,

and he goes to the window and looks out through the dirty window. And, he sees David coming, and he figures that David is going to do him in. But, David tells Mephibosheth that he just wants to elevate him, and make him wealthy, and restore him. And, he makes it clear that he's doing it not for Mephibosheth's sake, but he's doing it for Jonathan's sake.

A. The King's Fellowship

And so, I want you to look here, if you would, in 2 Samuel chapter 9, and notice the things that old Mephibosheth received. Look in chapter 9, verse 7: *"And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and [I] will restore [unto] thee all [of] the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually"* (2 Samuel 9:7). Just underscore that: *"thou shalt eat bread at my table"* (2 Samuel 9:7). It may seem like a small thing, but I want you to see how many times the Holy Spirit repeats it. Look down here in verse 10—the same thing, the end of that verse: *"thy master's son shall eat bread alway at my table"* (2 Samuel 9:10). I want you to look down again at verse 11—the last part of that verse: *"[and] he shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons"* (2 Samuel 9:11). And then, verse 13—the end of that verse: *"he [shall] eat continually"—"for he did eat continually at the king's table"* (2 Samuel 9:13). Over, and over, and over again, the Holy Spirit just keeps bringing back the phrase "at the king's table"—"the king's table," "the king's table." What is that telling us? Friend, listen, when you become a Christian, I don't care whether or not you have a freezer full of filet mignon—makes no difference—you, as a Christian, eat at the King's table. Did you know that? Do you remember what Jesus said? *"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man [will] hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will"—do what?—"and will sup with him, and he with me"* (Revelation 3:20).

Oh friend, listen, no matter how poor you may eat... One man told me, "Back in the Depression, we had three meals a day. We had oatmeal for breakfast, cornmeal for dinner, and no meal for supper." That may be just back the way you can remember some of those days, but I don't care what there is set on your table today—there's someone else who prepares a table before you in the presence of your enemies, and He is the Lord Jesus Christ. And, you have the King's fellowship, sitting at the King's table. You see, friend, a meal is the most intimate of fellowship. Now, I don't care what your political persuasion, I know enough about you that if President Carter were to send you a special invitation to go to the White House to have an intimate supper with his family, you'd never get finished telling your friends about it: "Eve, did I tell you about the time I..." You'd just say over and over, "Just one meal!" But, look—here's Mephibosheth who sits continually at the king's table. Now folks, I don't care how much money you may have in the bank or may not have in the bank, don't forget that you've got the

King's fellowship.

B. **The King's Fortune**

But, not only did he have the king's fellowship, he also had the king's fortune. Look in verses 9 and 10: *"Then the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house. Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him"—that is, "for Mephibosheth"—"and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy master's son may have food to eat"* (2 Samuel 9:9–10). That is, he just restored to Mephibosheth his inheritance; he made him an heir of the king, the king's fortune. Spiritually, that's what happens to us. We have the King's fortune, and we have servants. You say, "Now, wait a minute. I understand about the fortune, but I don't... Who are the servants?" Why, the angels that wait on you—ministering spirits. Did you know that each of us has an angel to wait upon us and to serve us, to take care of us? And, you've been complaining about being poor!

C. **The King's Family**

Oh, but let me tell you something else: not only is there the king's fellowship and the king's fortune—why, there's the king's family! Look in verse 11 of this same chapter—the last part of verse 11: *"[And] as for Mephibosheth, said the king, he shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons"* (2 Samuel 9:11), not just as a guest. David said, "I'm going to take Mephibosheth, and I'm going to treat him as my own dear son." Isn't that wonderful, dear friend? And, you've been complaining about your poverty, and you're in the king's family. Listen, you may not have much money in the bank, and you may not be a Rockefeller or Van Astor, but let me tell you something: you are a royal blueblood—don't you forget it. *"Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted"* (James 1:9). I want you to remember that you're a prince, a royal blueblood. From now on, you just call me "Prince Adrian," will you? I'm somebody, and you're somebody, if you're saved, if you're born again. And, this is what God wants you to know: that no matter how poor you may be in this world's eyes, in Jesus Christ, you are rich.

Now, this is a test that many of you may have to pass, and it is the test of poverty. And, I know there a lot of people who don't want to pass that test; they don't want to be tested by poverty. But, you may well be tested by poverty.

II. **The Humiliation of the Prosperous Man**

But, there's another test that's even harder to pass than the test of poverty, and it is the test of plenty. Did you know that it's harder to pass that test than it is the test of poverty? I want you to know that it's extremely hard for a man to pass the test of prosperity. So, not only do I want you to notice in verse 9—let's go back to James, if we can now, for

just a moment—not only do I want you to notice in verse 9 the exaltation of the poor man, but in verse 10 I want you to notice the humiliation of the prosperous man—the humiliation of the prosperous man.

Now, if you're rich, here's what God says to you today: God says, *"But the rich"*—and he's talking about the rich brother, the rich Christian; not just any rich man, but the rich brother—*"But the rich"*—he is to rejoice, and that is inferred from verse 9; he is to rejoice—*"in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away"*—now, the Lord tells the poor man to rejoice, because in Jesus, he's gone from rags to riches. But now, he tells the rich man to rejoice. Why? Because he's made low. James is a strange fellow. He says, "You just be happy 'cause the Lord's made you low"—*"because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away"*—that's another reason to rejoice." He says, "You're going to fade up like a desert flower and blow away"—*"For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but [that] it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace in the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways"* (James 1:10–11). And, the Lord is saying to the rich man, "This is a reason for you to rejoice." You rejoice why? Because in spite of your riches, you have found the Lord Jesus Christ, and this is something that not many rich men do.

Now, notice the Lord does not tell the rich man to renounce his riches. There's nothing here about renouncing your riches. He just tells him to properly assess his riches. You see, it is not wrong to have money. You're not especially holy if you're poor. You can be poor and be very mean. And, you're not especially mean if you're rich. You can be rich and very saintly. As a matter of fact, if you study the Bible, you'll find that some of God's choicest of saints were extremely wealthy. Abraham is an example of one—Joseph and others—who suffered adversity at times but were extremely rich. And, the Bible says, *"It is [the Lord thy God] that giveth thee power to get wealth"* (Deuteronomy 8:18). And so, don't you go around thinking that rich people are not necessarily God's people. They may be a brother—that's what James is saying. But, if he is a brother and if he is rich, he is to see his riches from a proper perspective. Just as the poor man knows that he is gone from rags to riches in Christ, the rich man in this world knows that in Christ he has gone from seeming riches to reality. And so, James is saying to the rich man, "You too must make a proper assessment of your riches. You too must see it from God's point of view."

Now, actually, the truth of the matter is, it's very hard to be poor, and it's even harder to be rich—that is, to pass the test. Now, the rich man may have an easier time in life, but he has a harder time passing the test. Did you know that many of you could get by better being poor than you could being rich—that some people can stand almost anything but prosperity? Look in Proverbs chapter 30. Let me show you something real here. Turn to Proverbs chapter 30 for a moment. Here's what Agur said. He was

seeking something from the Lord. I'm reading Proverbs chapter 30, beginning in verse 7—Agur said this: *“Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die”*—now, Agur says, “There two things, Lord, I would really like to have before I die. One”—*“Remove...me [from] vanity and lies”*—that's one thing he wanted. Well, we all say, “Amen” to that. Here's the other one—*“give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me”*—now, why didn't he want to have riches?—*“Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD?”*—and why didn't he want poverty?—*“or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain”* (Proverbs 30:7–9). Here was a man who knew what was convenient for him. And, he didn't desire to be rich, and he didn't desire to be poor. He said, “Lord, You know me. You give me what's convenient for me.”

You know, I believe that about most of us have just about all God can trust us with, don't you? “O God, You give me that which is convenient for me.” You see, the rich man is very prone, sometimes, to trust in his riches. And then, he gets proud, and he turns from the Lord. And so, James says to a rich man who has been saved, a rich man who has truly come to the Lord, a rich man who has truly been born again (and many of them are)—he says, “You rejoice for three reasons.”

A. **A New Position**

Number one: You have a new position. You've been made low, and that's good, because, you see, it's not bad to be made low—it's good to be made low. For Jesus says that the way up is down. You see, “he who would be chief, let him become the servant of all” (Matthew 20:27). And, Jesus said, “Humble yourself, and you'll be exalted” (Luke 18:14). Now, you see, sometimes it's hard for a rich man to humble himself. I thank God for a man who has wealth and yet is humble about it. Many of them are not. Jesus said in the Gospel of Mark—and you may want to turn to it when you get home—but Jesus said in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 10, verses 23 and following that it would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it would be for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven (Mark 10:25).

Now, what's he talking about? Ladies, I don't believe he's talking about the kind of needle that you mend your husband's socks with—excuse me, you use to mend your husband's socks. I'm not talking about that kind of needle, but I'm talking... In the Bible, around the walls of Jerusalem and other cities, they had little low gates about as tall as this pulpit and about as wide as this pulpit—a little wider—and this was to keep people from riding horseback through the streets of the city at nighttime. A man could kind of get underneath, and go under, and so forth, but the animals couldn't go through, especially camels. And, this little gate was called “the eye of a needle.” Now, a camel could possibly get through, but you ought to see a camel trying to go through the eye of

a needle. I mean, he'd have to get down on his knees, and anything he had on his back had to be taken off; and he just kind of works through. Now, Jesus said it's easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than it would be for a rich man to get into Heaven (Mark 10:25). That man has to get down low like that camel and get that burden off his back. And, he comes in this way, and James says, "If you, dear friend, have seen yourself in spite of all of your riches, that your riches don't give you security, that you need the Lord," he says, "you rejoice in that that you have a new position."

B. A New Perspective

And then, not only a new position, but a new perspective. You see, the rich man now has learned something—that his riches are transitory, that they're fleeing. Look at it again—this is the reason he is to rejoice: "*[for] as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace and the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways*" (James 1:10–11). He's just saying, "Mister, you can't take it with you."

A man said, "I always believed that until I saw, the other day, a hearse with a U-haul tied behind it." But, you can't take it with you. Billy Sunday said, "If you could, it would melt where some of you are going." But, you can't take it with you; it's transitory. You say, "Why?" You just hold it in your fingers for just a little while, and it's gone. And, James is very practical, and he's very tough. He's saying now, "If you're poor, you rejoice that in Jesus you've been made rich; but if you're saved and you're rich, rejoice in that God has shown you your new position and God has given you a new perspective—you've understood that riches are very transitory." You see, no longer do you have your outlook geared to things that you can weigh, and see, and feel, and touch, and count, and take to the bank. *You want to know how rich you really are? Okay—you add up everything that you have that money cannot buy and that death cannot take away. Then you'll know how rich you are.*

C. A New Prosperity

And so, James tells the rich man to rejoice in that God has opened his eyes, that he has seen his new position—he's gotten a new perspective. And, therefore, he sees his new prosperity. He too is very rich—not because of the money in the bank, but because of Christ in his heart. He too has a brother; he has a prosperity. He too is rich, but this time he is truly rich. He sees his prosperity; he discovers that he, like the poor man, is a spiritual millionaire in Christ. The Bible says, "*The rich and the poor meet together: the LORD is the maker of them all*" (Proverbs 22:2). And, isn't it great that when you get right down to it, that the ground around the cross is level? James is going to have some more to say about that. But folks, it doesn't make any difference whether you're a

millionaire or pauper. In Jesus, we're all one—we're one—and no big shots, no little shots. And, we're all rich, fabulously wealthy, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

III. The Coronation of the Purified Man

And so, James, very wisely, is talking about the test of material things, and he speaks about the exaltation of the poor man, and then he speaks about the humiliation of the prosperous man; and then, he goes on to talk about the coronation of the purified man. Look, if you will, in verse 12: *"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him"* (James 1:12). Receiving a crown is a coronation. But, who's going have this coronation? The one who is purified. You see, Job says, *"When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold"* (Job 23:10). And so, the trials here are to purify us and to make us stand. And, when a man meets the test of money—whether it is the test of poverty or whether it is the test of plenty, whether it is feast or whether it is famine—if he passes that test, then he's going to wear a crown.

Now, some of you, I'm afraid, would not pass the test. I'm afraid that there are some of you who are listening to me right now—things are going for you pretty well, but if suddenly the financial rug is dropped out from underneath you, or snatched out from underneath you—suddenly you lose your job and perhaps lose your health at the same time—that you'll get discouraged and quit coming to church. I know folks—I've seen it happen so many times—when adversity comes, they flunk the test. And, there are some more of you that when prosperity comes to you, you'll flunk the test. Some of you are going to be wealthy, who are not wealthy now. Your rich uncle is going die in the poor house somewhere, and you're going to get an inheritance. And, you don't even have a foggy notion about it right now. Or, something is going to happen to you, and you're going to come into money. And, a congregation this size—surely that's true, and especially talking about those who are listening on television and radio. And, when your prosperity comes, when you used to sit in church with an open Bible, loving the Lord, when you get all that money, something's going to happen to you: you're going to forget God; you're going to go off your own way, and you will have failed the test of prosperity. Some people can stand almost anything but prosperity. And, you'll become a different person.

Not all of you—I dare say that many of you, when the test comes, whether it be the test of poverty or whether it be the test of prosperity, you'll pass it, and you'll pass it with flying colors. And, because you do, what is in you will be revealed. And, when you're tried and you endure temptation, then you're going to receive a crown—a crown of life—because you will have proven what's really in you. And, there are three things I want us to say now about the coronation of the purified man.

A. The Requirement

First of all, I want you to notice the requirement. “*Blessed*”—look at it—“*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation*” (James 1:12)—that means, “the guy who sticks it out.” Remember that we said that “*tribulation worketh patience*” (Romans 5:3), and this word *patience* means “the ability to endure.” It’s not always God’s plan that you go through life without having being tested. You need to be tested. And, the requirement is that you be steadfast. Don’t be like “*a double minded man...unstable in all [of] his ways*” (James 1:8). You make up your mind right now that, when the test of life comes, that you’re going to stick it out.

A little boy, one time, had an old horse that was more like a nag than anything else—just an old dilapidated, flea-bitten, swayback horse. And, a man made fun of the little boy’s horse and said, “Son, is that a race horse?” He said, “No, sir.” He said, “Is he a plow horse?” He said, “No, sir.” He said, “He is a show horse?” He said, “No, sir.” He said, “Well, can he run fast?” He said, “No, sir, but he can stand fast.” You know, God is not interested in whether or not you’re a race horse, whether you’re a show horse. I think God wants to know, can you stand fast? Can you stand fast? Can you endure temptation? Can you pass the test? That’s what James is talking about.

B. The Reward

Now, first of all, the requirement to endure temptation; secondly, there’s the reward. “*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life*” (James 1:12). You know, athletes work for a corruptible crown. The word here for *crown* is not *stephanos*, the crown that a king would wear, but it’s the laurel of the runner, the athlete, the crown that he would receive. You know, many of us are has-beens when it comes to athletics.

I’m a has-been. I used to be an athlete, and used to play football down in Florida, and went to college on a football scholarship, and loved to play football. And, I was the captain of the championship football team down in Florida. I remember that we were so interested in getting our football letter and our sweater. They gave us a maroon sweater because maroon and white were our colors, and it had a PB on it. That didn’t stand for “poor boy,” though it could have; it stood for “Palm Beach.” I played for Palm Beach High School. And then, when we won the championship, we got a gold football with champions on it. Oh, my—that was something to have! And then, by some way, I received a big trophy like that for being captain of the team and some other things—big ole’ trophy. And, you know, those things came hard—I’m talking about gallons of sweat and pints of blood in order to get those trophies. You know, I thought about it the other day: where those things are I haven’t gotten the foggiest notion. The moths got the sweater—I know that. It’s gone. A thief got the football, and the last time I saw the

trophy it was all tarnished. And, I don't have even an idea whether it's still in existence or not. You see, we work for a corruptible crown. It's not talking about enduring for a corruptible crown—talking about athletes—but we endure for an incorruptible crown. Oh, the crown of life!

Now, he's not talking about salvation. Salvation is the gift of God. You get salvation when you receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord. But oh, he's talking about the laurel that is put on the runner's brow when he has been faithful. When I get to Heaven, I don't want to get the booby prize. I want my Lord to say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Thou has been faithful over a few things. I will make thee ruler over many."

C. The Resource

And so, the requirement is to endure temptation. The reward is a crown of life. But now, I want you to notice the resource; and now, we're really getting down to, in modern parlance, "where the rubber meets the road." Look at it. What is the resource for living this kind of a life? How can a man live this kind of a life—whether a tent or a palace, he still rejoices? How can he live this kind of a life where he is not pressed in by materialistic concepts like everybody else is around him? What is the resource? Well, read verse 12: "*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him*" (James 1:12). The resource for living this kind of life is to love the Lord.

You see, the reason that people love the world more than they ought to love the world is they don't love the Lord like they ought to love the Lord. John, in his first epistle, says, "*If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him*" (1 John 2:15). Now, I want you to think about that: the reason that we love the world is because the love of the Father is not in us.

You're driving down the road in your automobile, and that red light comes on the dashboard that says there's no oil in the car. Well, an easy way to fix that is reach under your seat, get a hammer, and break that light—and then you've taken care of it, haven't you? No, not at all. You see, that red light on the dashboard is the indicator that tells you there's no oil in the crankcase; and so, rather than breaking the light, you put the oil in the crankcase. For if the light is on the dashboard, the oil is not in the crankcase. "*If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him*" (1 John 2:15). The love of the world is the light that shows you there's no spiritual oil in your crankcase. You don't love God, and the love of the world is just the warning signal that somehow the love of God is not in you. And, you're not over here, supposed to be constantly fighting the world, and taking your hammer, and breaking that light, but what you are to do is to get the love of God in you. And, when a man loves the Lord, then he doesn't have to be tied

to this world. The things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace. And so, the resource for living this kind of life is to have the love of the Lord down in your heart; and when you do that, then you're going to know the victory that only the Lord Jesus Christ can give.

Now, let me talk about this crown for just a moment. I think all of us enjoy the Billy Graham Crusade. In my estimation, one of the finest things that happened here in the city of Memphis, Tennessee, has been the Billy Graham Crusade. I am so grateful to God for those dear brothers who came. And, of those who served us, one of the sweetest men that I've ever known or had the privilege of meeting is George Beverly Shea. George Beverly Shea, in my estimation, is a great, great man. And, he is called "America's most beloved gospel singer," and I can understand why. And, you know, he's been so consistent through the years, but when George Beverly Shea was 27 years of age, he was working as a medical secretary for the Mutual Life Insurance Company. But, he was a singer, and he had this ability to sing, and he loved the Lord. And, there came a time where George Beverly Shea could audition for some singers, The Lynn Murray Singers, who were very famous in that time—and they were on a nationwide radio hookup. Of course, they didn't have television, but the radio. And, he had a chance to audition to sing with the group.

And, when he went to wait for the audition, he learned that if he were hired, it would automatically double his salary right away—just double it just like that. And, besides that, it would give him nationwide exposure. And so, George Beverly Shea went in there and sang, and they liked what they heard; and they gave him a piece of music to learn and said, "We'll call you tomorrow." And, he went home, and he looked at that piece of music to learn. And, in there was just one little phrase that gave him difficulty, and the phrase was "To Hell with Burgundy." It was just one of those songs that had that—"To Hell with Burgundy." And, this sensitive Christian man looked at that, and he thought, "Now, what would my preacher daddy think—my Wesleyan Methodist preacher daddy think—to hear me singing a song like that (and my voice dedicated to the Lord)?" And, he thought about it. And, this is what George Beverly Shea said to the Lord: "Lord, maybe You're trying to test me, but I cannot believe that this is the way that You would have me to serve You." And, the next day when the phone rang, they said, "Congratulations, Mr. Shea. You are now one of the Lynn Murray Singers. You have been chosen." And, George Beverly Shea said, "I thank you very much for this honor, but I cannot accept it. Would you tell Mr. Murray for me that I thank him for his kindness, but I cannot take the job?"

Now, I know what some of you are thinking: "Oh preacher, you mean, just because one little phrase in a song—that's all?" But, for this man it was a straw in the wind. He had to make up his mind whether he was going out 100% for God or not. I

know many of you just laugh at that. You think it's ridiculous. But, you know, God's got his hand on George Beverly Shea, doesn't he? And, I thank God for a man that has a conscience so keenly honed that he wants the will of God. And, you may be surprised how many tests are coming to you day after day after day. And, you think they're just little things, but you choose the wrong, and you go the easy way, and you flunk the test, and you won't wear the crown. That's the reason I always get blessed when George Beverly Shea sings, "I'd Rather Have Jesus than Silver or Gold." I get blessed by that, because I know it's real in his heart, and he loves the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

God is going to bring many of you to the tests—I mean, you're going to be tested. Some of you are going to receive the test of poverty. I hope you'll pass it. Some of you are going to receive the test of prosperity, and that will be even harder to pass. But, I pray God that you will, and you'll be able to sing and win those battles over.

*We shall wear a crown, we shall wear a crown!
And when the battle's over, we shall wear a crown
In the new Jerusalem! (Harriette Waters).*

Let's bow our heads together in prayer.

Flawed Appetites and Fatal Attractions

By Adrian Rogers

Sermon Date: February 1, 2004

Main Scripture Text: James 1:12–15

Outline

Introduction

I. There Is a Courtship That Leads to a Consent

II. There Is a Consent That Leads to a Conception

III. There Is the Conception That Leads to a Consummation

Conclusion

Introduction

Amen. Be seated, please.

Take God's Word and find James chapter 1. That's back toward the back of the New Testament. Right after Hebrews you'll find the Book of James. James chapter 1. The title of the message today is, "Flawed Appetites and Fatal Attractions."

Now, you know, we, in America today, and in the world, have become a nation of victims. Victimology is what we practice today in America. Nobody wants to take the blame for anything. Now, I've been talking about challenges to the cross, and this is, perhaps, one of the biggest. The fact today that the word sin is old-fashioned. Nobody wants to take any personal responsibility. Man may be ill, not evil; man may be sick, not sinful. If there's anything wrong, it has to be somebody else's fault. It's the environment, heredity. It's glands. It's circumstances. It is society. The favorite game in America today is the blame game. Some even try to blame God. They say, "God, this is the way You made me," or, "God, You created these circumstances, so I'm just a helpless victim." It is as old as the Garden of Eden when Adam sinned against God. God came walking in the midst of the garden, and what did Adam say? "Well, God, the woman You gave me. Now, Lord, it's either Your fault or hers; it's not mine. I mean, You gave her to me. God, the woman You gave me, she caused me to sin." And when the Lord turned to Eve, what did she say? "The serpent beguiled me." And, of course, the serpent didn't have a leg to stand on. But everybody wants to blame somebody else for what they do. And, very frankly, this is a real problem in America.

There are cigarette smokers who are suing the tobacco industry, and, believe me, I

have not one good word to say for these peddlers of poison, the tobacco people, but people are suing the tobacco people because smoking has made them sick. Well, folks, can you read what's on the package? I mean, good night! These people are not making you smoke those things.

Three overweight teenagers have sued McDonald's because of the hamburgers they ate. You think about it.

In New York City, a man jumped in front of a subway train, jumped in front, and was mutilated, had his legs cut off. He sued the transit company because the train did not stop in time, and he won \$650,000. I mean, here's a guy that jumps in front of a train, and then says, "You should have stopped sooner. You hit me."

Do you see what I'm saying? Nobody's evil—they're just ill. Nobody is sinful—they're just sick. It is somebody else's fault.

Now, let me tell you something. God's Word has something to say about that. James chapter 1—look, if you will, in verse 12: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried—that is, when he is tested—he shall receive the crown..."—God will allow temptation to test you, my friend—"he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust...—underscore that phrase, of his own lust—every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

Now, this passage doesn't say, if you're tempted; it says when you're tempted. There's not a mother's child in this building who is not tempted daily. Day by day, we're tempted. But now notice what James is saying to these modern-day excuse makers and to those of his day so long ago.

First of all, he's saying it is impossible to tempt God with evil. God cannot be tempted. He says this in verse 13: "God cannot be tempted with evil." Why cannot God not be tempted with evil? Well, first of all, God is completely whole. God has no itch the devil can scratch. And God is totally holy. He is the antithesis of sin. God, holy, holy, holy, is Almighty God. God cannot be tempted with evil. And now, listen. God will never, ever, ever tempt you with evil. God will not tempt you with evil. If God were to tempt you with evil, you would have a perfect alibi. You would say, "Well, after all, who can withstand God?" So put away your little excuse to say that "God brought me into this circumstance, to cause me to do evil," or that "God gave me these glands; God made me this way." No, you cannot—you cannot, you cannot—blame God. Now, God will test you, and God will prove you, but God will never induce you to do evil. God gives us

tests to make us stand. Satan gives us temptations to make us stumble. Now, it does not come from God. Satan is an agent in temptation. But, brothers and sisters, listen to me: sin is inside job!

You're going to be tempted. If you are a friend of God, you're going to be tempted. Don't get the idea that being saved or walking with God will keep you from being tempted. Jesus was tempted. He was perfect. When you become the friend of God, ipso facto, you become the enemy of Satan. Being a Christian may increase your temptations. If you've never met the devil, it's because you and the devil have been going in the same direction. You turn around. Rather than being in collusion with the devil, you're going to be collision with the devil. No. Being saved does not make you immune to temptation. As a matter of fact, when God opens the windows of heaven to bless you, the devil will open the doors of hell to blast you. You're going to be tempted. Satan has laid plans to sabotage your life and to bring you down. But he cannot do it without your consent.

Now, here's the message today, and I want you to get it down in your heart and in your life. Sin is an inside job. It starts in you. Notice again what he says in this passage in verse 14: "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust—his own lust—and enticed." Do you have that? Now, what he is saying here is that a sin is very much like a seduction; you know, like a man may seduce a woman, or a woman may seduce a man. That's what the word drawn away literally means. That word means entice—entice.

I. There Is a Courtship That Leads to a Consent

Now, here's point number one, and get it down good: There is a courtship that leads to a consent—a courtship that leads to a consent.

Now, the devil is going to court you. Temptation will come your way to entice you. "Every man is tempted when he is drawn away." Do you see that word drawn away? Do you know what that word literally means? It was used in that day of men who were trappers who would trap animals. Or it was used of fishermen who would catch a fish with a bait or a lure. It's a word to entrap, to ensnare, to allure. This is what it's all about.

I remember the first bass I ever caught with an artificial lure. I thought no bass could be this stupid. Somebody said, "You take that piece of wood with those hooks on it and throw it out there by those lily pads." And I was with some other people, and I wanted them to think that I was a macho man. And so these guys believe in this kind of fishing. I'm going to believe in it. And I walked up and down the bank of that canal there, and the guys were way off over there—I could hear them talking—and just nonchalantly I'm throwing that thing out and getting it snarled up and trying to undo it and finally get it

back again. And I threw that plug out, and all of a sudden the water exploded, and I saw this thing come out of the water. It's one of those things where he just knocked the plug out of the water, but it was in his mouth. That line tightened and the fight was on. It was so exciting. I didn't even reel him in; I backed him out and pulled—pulled him out. What a dumb fish. What a dumb fish—a piece of wood with paint on it and hooks in it. But there was something in that bass that said, "I want that," and he went after it. That's the word he's using here—enticed, drawn away. But he uses the word here not to talk about bass, but about people. "Every man is drawn away of his own lust."

Now, do you think it's by accident that they call prostitutes hookers? Hookers. Here's a man. He sees a prostitute, and he's what? That's the bait. That's Satan's bait. And he is drawn away of his own lust. Here is the anatomy of a sin. There is a courtship that leads to a consent. The devil flirts. The devil has his bait. He tries to draw you away. It begins with a flirtation.

Now, the devil will throw the match, but the devil has to have the gasoline of a unholy desire in order for it to do some good. You see, it really begins not on the outside, but on the inside. Put this verse in your margin—Mark chapter 7, verses 21 and following: "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders. Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these things come from within, and defile the man." Now, the problem in America is nobody wants to admit that anymore. A person says, "I practice sexual perversion because I was born with this desire." Friend, that's no excuse any more than a pedophile can say, "I practice pedophilia because I was born with this desire," or a kleptomaniac can say, "I practice thievery because I'm born with this desire," or a murderer can say, "I practice murder because I'm born with this desire." These things come out of the heart. And we can't say, "God, You made me this way; therefore, I'm not to blame." No, friend. We have to understand that sin is an inside job.

When I was a teen still in high school, I read a book. The title of the book was called, "The Big Con," and it talked about confidence men. Do you know what a confidence game is? Where somebody is tricked into giving away their money. Some real slick person will bring a confidence game, what they call a confidence game, and many times these are elderly people. Sometimes little old women will be in a grocery store, and a man will come up and say, "Look here. I've found an envelope full of money. What do you think I ought to do with it?" She says, "I don't know." He says, "I'll tell you what. I want you for a witness. Let's see what we ought to do with this money. If I don't find out what to do with it, we'll just share it, okay?" She says, "Wow, yeah, that'd be good." And he says, "Now, in order to know that you're honest and really with me, let's go to the

bank and get some of your money out. You put your money with this money so I can show that you're really with me," you see. Off she goes, gets her money out of the bank, gives it to him. He says, "Now, you hold the money," and he gives her an envelope full of paper, and he goes off with her money. She's what? She's conned. Well, this book was a very intriguing book, a very interesting book. I read it, again, as a teen in high school. But here was the underlying premise of that book, and I want all of you to listen. These men, who were con men, confidence men, who would get somebody else's confidence; they said this: "Nobody can be caught in a confidence scheme unless he, first of all, has—now, listen to this—a touch of larceny in his heart." I don't care. It might be a little lady. I don't care who it is. Unless they, first of all, have a touch of larceny in their own heart. They may be fine, noble, upstanding, in the eyes of the people. You see, what Satan is looking for is that inside thing, that touch of larceny that is in the human heart.

Now, Satan throws out the lure. Satan throws out the bait. Satan lights the match. He does all of this. He draws people away, but with that courtship there must be a consent. The sinner says, "I do." There's a courtship that leads to a consent. You cannot blame God. You cannot blame the devil. You cannot blame circumstance. The Bible says you are drawn away of your own lusts. You're absolutely free, no matter what the temptation, and it's not a sin to be tempted; you're absolutely free until the point of choice. Once you choose, once you've said, "I do," that is the consent. Now, you're free to choose, but you're not free to choose the consequences of your choice. After you choose, then your choice chooses for you. Point number one: The courtship that leads to consent.

II. There Is a Consent That Leads to a Conception

Point number two: The consent that leads to conception. First, there's a courtship; then, there's a consent; and then, there is a conception. Look, if you will now, in verse 15: "And, lust, then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and lust, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin." You see, there's a courtship. There's a consent. And then, there is a conception. There comes an unholy union that brings an unholy child, and that unholy child is sin. The mother of sin is inward lust. The father of sin is outward attraction. And when these come together, there is a sin that is produced. There is a fatal attraction—that's the father. There is a flawed appetite—that is the mother. And when these two come together, there is a conception.

Now, when a baby is conceived, many times there's great joy in the physical realm. People say, "Look, we're having a new baby in our home." And so it is sometimes with sin. When people conceive some act of sin, and I'm not talking about now having a

baby, though there may be some unholy union like that, and poor little children that sometimes don't have the benefit of married parents. Now, let me say this: There are no illegitimate children, but there are plenty of illegitimate parents. But I'm not just talking about it in that realm. I'm talking about any sin that is a child of lust and consent, whatever it is—whatever it is. At the moment, it may seem so joyful. It may seem so pleasant. It may seem so beautiful. It may seem so natural. And so, you may be going on right now high, wide, and handsome, living in sin, having a wonderful time. "Lust, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin." What a beautiful baby—any kind of sin.

III. There Is the Conception That Leads to a Consummation

But now, here's the third thing. There is the conception that leads to a consummation. There is a courtship. There is a consent. There is a conception. And then there is a consummation. Now, folks, listen to me. This is a message that America has forgotten and the pulpits have forgotten— and here's the message: the wages of sin is death.

What is the consummation? Look at it again in verse 15: "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." When it is finished. Now, do you know what the word "when it is finished" means? That means when it is literally full-grown. So you can't see sin when it's a baby. You must have been a beautiful baby, but, baby, look at you now. You can't see sin when it feels so good, when it seems so natural, when it seems so right. You think, perhaps, you've beat the game, but you've not. "The soul that sinneth, it shall surely die." "The wages of sin is death." "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." First, sin fascinates; then, it assassinates. First, it thrills; then, it kills. "Lust, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." The child of lust is sin, and the grandchild of lust is death. "And lust, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." Lust. Sin. Death—LSD.

Now, young people don't see this today. Young people don't listen to the Word of God. First of all, they say, "It's really not my fault. Somebody made me do it. God wouldn't have made me this way. It's all right. Society doesn't blame me any more." Why, we even have a no-fault divorce. Give me a break! Nobody's to blame. Or, "God, You're to blame," or, "Satan, you're to blame," or, "Circumstances, you're to blame," or, "Glands, you're to blame." No! "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. And lust, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." Listen to me. You will not beat the game. You will not. You will not beat the game. The blame game is a fun game to play, but you will always be the loser.

Now, notice how sin ends. Let's just take some things. For example, alcohol, liquor—everybody tells us, “Oh, it's all right to drink today.” We've humanized God, and liquorized society, and minimized sin. Let me give you a verse. Put in your margin Proverbs 23, verses 31 and 32: “Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.” That means, when it's fermented. There's a time when wine is not fermented. People say, “Well, Jesus drank wine.” Jesus did not drink what is bottled today and called wine. That, in the Bible, would definitely be strong drink, condemned. “Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last—underscore that now—at the last—listen—at the last—at the last—it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.” Not at the first—at the last.

What are the most beautiful advertisements on television and in magazines and on the billboards? The liquor advertisements—the liquor advertisements. Even at Christmas you see those Clydesdales going through that snow. Is that not beautiful? Is that not a beautiful ad? They never show some teenager with his face sliced up, having gone through a windshield. They never go down to the emergency room. They never show the drunkard in the gutter covered in his own vomit with flies. They don't show that. They don't show the last. They only show the first. These guys sitting in that bass boat holding up Old Milwaukee, and they say, “It never gets any better than this.” They're right. It always gets worse. “At the last—at the last, at the last—it biteth like a serpent.”

Down in Florida, I had an artist to paint a billboard to put on the parking lot in a church in Fort Pierce where I was pastor, and it showed some garbage cans and a big rat about eight inches long, and a drunkard down there with a broken bottle lying by those garbage cans in a back alley. And I had put underneath that painting, “The finished product of the brewer's art,” because there was a beer that was advertising, “The finest product of the brewer's art.” So I just put, “The finished product of the brewer's art,” and put that up on the parking lot for the boys and girls to see. I got a call at home, and a man said, “Are you Adrian Rogers?” Yes, I am. “Are you the pastor of that church?” Yes, I am. He said, “Well, I am the distributor for thus-and-such a beer, “and he said, “You've got a sign on your parking lot I need to talk to you about.” I said, “Fine, I'll meet you. And as soon as you can get in my office I'll be there.” I went right down and I sat down, and I said, “What do you want to talk about that sign for?” He said, “That sign discriminates against my product.” I said, “Your product is brewed with tears, thickened with blood, and flavored with death, and if I were you, I'd get on my knees right now and ask God Almighty to have mercy on me.” He said, “Wow.” He said, “I don't think I'm going to get anywhere with you.” He said, “I think that looks like

grounds for a lawsuit.” I said, “I do, too.” I said, “Please sue me. I want my picture on the front page of the newspaper. I want that billboard on the front page of the newspaper.” And I said, “You’ve got a lot of nerve. You come into our homes with your advertisements. You come with your billboards. You come with magazines. You come with this and that. And I put one billboard on a parking lot for boys and girls in Sunday school and you don’t like it.” I said, “I’ll make a deal with you. You take down all your signs; I’ll take down mine.” “At the last it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder.” The devil doesn’t want you to see the end.

What about immorality? Everything today is run by sex. Proverbs 5, verses 3 through 5—listen to this: “For the lips of a strange woman drop as a honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil.” This is one of those hookers I’ve been talking about. Listen to it again: “The lips of a strange woman drop as a honeycomb, her mouth is smoother than oil.” Old honey lips. And this poor fish... Listen to what God’s Word says: “But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; and her steps take hold on hell.” You’re not going to break God’s laws. God says, “Flee fornication.” I mean, you’re not going to break them with impunity; you’re broken on them. God’s Word says, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” “Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” Friend, we could talk about so many things.

Human pride. You say, “Well, I don’t have to listen to this, preacher.” No, you don’t. You say, “I have my own ideas.” You may. Proverbs 14, verse 12: “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” You could say, “I have my own religion. I have my own ideas. I’m going my own way.” Well, help yourself, but the end thereof are the ways of death. “Sin, when it is finished...” Former pastor of this church, Dr. R. G. Lee, said, “You can eat the devil’s corn if you want to, but he’ll choke you on the cob.” “The bread of deceit is sweet, but afterward a man’s mouth shall be filled with gravel.” So what do we have? We have a courtship. We have a consent. We have a conception. We have a consummation. “Sin, when it is finished...”

Now, let’s see if we can wrap this up. Where is the problem? Sin is an inside job. Remember Mark 7. Jesus said, “All these things come out of the heart—out of the heart.” You can’t blame anybody else. “Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts, and enticed.” This is an inside job. Well, you’re not going to get rid of temptation. As long as you live, as long as you exist, there will be temptation. So what are you going to do? The only thing you can possibly do is to have an inward change, to get your heart changed. And if you don’t get your heart changed, Satan’s not going to stop tempting you, so you’ve got to get your heart changed. You see, you’ve got to get your want fixed. That’s what Jesus did for me when He saved me. I want to tell you something. I sin all I want to, because I don’t want to. I don’t want to, because

something happened in me when Jesus saved me.

There was an old-timey preacher named Lester Roloff. Any of you ever heard of Lester Roloff? Let me see your hands. Yeah, about several hundred. He was a great, old preacher. Lester Roloff told one of the most incredible stories about a man who was having difficulty, and he went to see the doctor. And he said, “Doctor, I want you to do something for me.” And, by the way, the name of the doctor was Doctor Law—L-A-W.

And Dr. Law said, “Well, what’s the matter?”

He said, “It’s my eyes. My eyes are looking at the wrong kinds of things. I’m looking at pornography. And my hands—my hands are doing things and taking things that don’t belong to me. And my feet—my feet are going places I ought not to go. And my problem is my eyes, my hands, my feet.”

And Dr. Law says, “No, that’s not your problem. Your problem is your heart.”

“No,” he says, “no, no, no. It’s my hands, my eyes. I ought to know.”

Dr. Law says, “Trust me. It is your heart.”

“Well, okay, Dr. Law. Can you give me some medicine?”

“Nope.”

“Can you give me some exercises?”

“Nope.”

“Well, Dr. Law, what are you good for?”

“I only diagnose, and I’m telling you you’ve got a fatal disease and it’s going to kill you, and your problem is your heart.”

“Well, Dr. Law, you mean I’m going to die? Is there no hope?”

“Oh, yeah, there’s hope.”

“Well, what kind of hope?”

“Well, you need a heart transplant.”

“A what?”

“You need a new heart.”

“Well, can you do that surgery?”

“Oh, no. I don’t do that surgery. I just diagnose.”

“Well, who does it?”

“Dr. Grace.”

“Dr. Grace? Well, where’s Dr. Grace?”

“Right across the hall.”

“Do I have to make an appointment?”

“Oh, no. He’ll see you immediately.”

“What will it cost?”

“Nothing.”

“You mean he can give me a new heart?”

“Yes.”

“You mean he’ll do it right now?”

“Absolutely.”

“You mean I don’t have to make an appointment? I can just go in?”

“Yes.”

“And it won’t cost anything?”

“Nope.”

“Will it hurt?”

“It sure may. It may hurt, but you need a new heart. Step across the hall and tell him that I sent you.”

And the man steps across the hall and knocks on the door, and there comes the most kind looking man he’s ever seen, Dr. Grace. And he says, “Dr. Grace, Dr. Law sent me here, and he says I’ve got a bad heart. Can you do anything for me?”

“Yes, I can.” And Dr. Grace puts me on his table, and reaches in with his hand, and takes out my heart. And when I see it, it is so vile. I’m still awake during this operation. It’s vile. It stinks. It’s loathsome. I never dreamed how corrupt my heart was. And then, Dr. Grace puts within me a new heart. Immediately there is a change with my eye, with my hands, and with my feet, because I have been given a new heart.

Conclusion

Now, friend, if you’ll read in James chapter 1, that’s what James is talking about. After he talks about that old heart, that old desire, that old lust, then he says down there in verse 18, “Of his own will begat he us.” That is, we are born again.

First of all, there’s the conception of sin. But then, there’s the conception of the new birth. “Of his own will he begat us with his word.”

I’m not perfect. You say, “I already knew that, Pastor.” I’m not perfect, but Jesus gave me a new heart. He gave me a new heart. And I have within me today the strength and the power that I need to live victoriously, and I don’t have to make excuses. I don’t have to try to blame God or circumstances. But I can say, “By the grace of God, I am what I am—changed, changed.”

Would you bow your heads in prayer. Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. You need a new heart today, and I’m telling you Dr. Law cannot save you. Dr. Law just says, “The wages of sin is death.” Dr. Law has made a good diagnosis, but Dr. Grace will save you today. His name is Jesus. Would you pray a prayer like this—pray it out of your heart: Dear God, I am a sinner, and the problem is my old heart, and I stop making excuses. Lord, I stop trying to blame somebody else. It’s me, it’s me, it’s me, O Lord,

standing in the need of prayer. Oh, Lord Jesus, give me a new heart today. Change me. Save me, Lord Jesus. Jesus, I believe You died on a cross to pay for my sin. I believe that God the Father raised You from the dead. And I believe You'll save me, if I trust You. I do trust You today. Save me, Lord Jesus.

Now, if you prayed that prayer, I want you to thank Him. Pray this way: Thank You for doing it. I don't look for a sign or ask for a feeling. I stand on Your Word. Begin now to make me the person You want me to be. In Your holy name I pray. Amen.

Now, friend, here's what I want you to do. Because Jesus loves you so much, because He died for you, and because He has commanded you to make it known publicly, when we stand and sing, I'm going to ask you to leave your seat and come forward. The reason I want you to do that is for several reasons. Number one: I want to help settle it and seal it in your heart. That's one of the ways you know you're not just playing games. Jesus said, "If you're ashamed of me, I'll be ashamed of you." Jesus said, "If you'll confess me before men, I'll confess you before my Father in heaven." Number two: It'll bless the church. Most of the people here today have already done what I'm asking you to do. They'll rejoice. They're praying for you. They would do it for you if they could. Number three: It will put the devil to shame. Number four: It'll glorify Jesus. What I'm going to ask you to do, when we stand and sing, if you mean business, you leave your seat and come forward. Standing at the head of each of these aisles all the way across the front will be a minister, a man of God, and you say to him, "I'm trusting Jesus." What will happen? We'll rejoice, give you some Scripture, answer any questions we can answer, and seal it with you in prayer. What a happy, holy time that will be. If you're in the balcony, you make your way over here, to that banner if you're on this side to my right, your left, that says Redeemer. If you're on this side, you move to my left, your right, to the banner that says Messiah. Somebody is waiting there to welcome you.

Others of you have already received Christ and confessed Him openly and publicly, and have had believer's baptism, but you need a church home. I'm going to ask you to come and say, "I want to place my membership here." If this is where you worship, and where God speaks to your heart, mostly likely it's where you need to belong. And everybody needs to belong to a local New Testament church somewhere. I want you to come and say, "I want to place my membership here."

There are others of you who may say, "Well, Pastor, you know, I've never really had believer's baptism. I don't have a membership to place anywhere." Well, you need to come and say, "I want to make an appointment for my baptism," to be baptized.

So some are coming, saying, "I'm trusting Christ." Others are coming, saying, "I want to place my membership here." Others are coming, saying, "I want to make an

appointment for my baptism.” Respectfully, I’m going to ask that no one leave during the invitation unless it is an emergency. Your leaving will disturb other worshipers. Be in a spirit of prayer. If you’re with a person that needs to come forward, you may come forward with them.

Let’s pray one more time. Lord, bless the invitation now, and help precious souls to say yes to Jesus. In His dear name. Amen.

You step out and come. Let’s stand together as we sing.

Flawed Appetites and Fatal Attractions

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: February 1, 2004

Main Scripture Text: James 1:12–15

“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.”

JAMES 1:13

Outline

Introduction

I. There Is a Courtship That Leads to Consent

II. There Is a Consent That Leads to Conception

III. There Is the Conception That Leads to Consummation

Conclusion

Introduction

Well, amen. Get your seats. Be seated. Take your Bible out. Get your Bible. If you don't have a Bible with you, there may be one in the rack there before you. Take out a Bible and find the Book of James. Now, James is back toward the back of the New Testament right after the Book of Hebrews, and find chapter 1. And when you've found it, look up here and let me tell you something.

The favorite game in America is not football. The favorite game in America is not baseball. It is the blame game. We want to blame everybody else for what has happened to us in America. We make excuses today, and the word sin is an old-fashioned word. Really, it's politically incorrect. Nobody is to be blamed; everybody is to be pitied if something happens to them. Man is not sinful—he's sick. He's not evil—he's ill. He's like a computer that maybe has been programmed wrongly, but he is not to blame. It is somebody else's fault. You see it where people are suing cigarette companies because they have lung cancer, and they sue the cigarette company. Now, believe me, believe me, I have nothing good to say about the peddlers of poison who make cigarettes and sell them in advertising, nothing good to say about them. But, hey, folks, listen. Can you read? On the label it says, “This is going to kill you.” And then you have the audacity to turn around and sue the manufacturer of the cigarettes. Now, I'm not saying anything good about the manufacturers, but pay attention.

I read recently where three overweight teenagers are suing McDonald's because of the fat content and so forth in the hamburgers.

In New York City, a man, to commit suicide, jumped up in front of the subway train, just jumped off on the tracks. The train runs over him, cuts off his legs. He's sues the transit company because the train did not stop in time. \$650,000 he got. I mean, he's the man that jumped off.

It's always somebody else's fault. It's either the environment, or it's our glands, or it's circumstances. Again, we're to be pitied, but we're not to be blamed.

Now, I've been talking about challenges to the cross, and you may say, "Pastor, is this a challenge to the cross?" Very definitely, because, until a man's sees that he is guilty before Almighty God, that he is a sinner by birth, nature, choice, he's not going to flee to the cross for redemption. But we live in a generation that's called a no-fault generation. We even have such a thing as a no-fault divorce. Give me a break. But that's what we want today is nobody is to be blamed for anything.

What I want to show you today is that sin is an inside job, that you cannot blame God, you cannot blame the devil, you cannot blame circumstances; you have to accept the blame by yourself. Sin is an inside job. The title of the message today is "Flawed Appetites and Fatal Attractions." And you'll understand the title a little bit later as we get into the message.

But the blame game is a very old game. It goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. After Adam had taken of the forbidden fruit, sinned against God, God came walking in the midst of the garden. Adam is confronted. Do you know what he does? He begins to blame God, and he begins to blame his wife. He said, "Lord, the woman You gave me. Now, it's either her fault or Your fault, God, but it is not mine. I mean, You made her. You gave her to me. So, Lord, it's not my fault." And so, when the woman is confronted, what does she say? "The serpent beguiled me." Of course, the serpent didn't have a leg to stand on. We're always trying to put the blame on somebody else, and I say that's as old as Eden, and it goes back to 2,000 years ago when James wrote the Book of James.

Look, if you will—chapter 1, verse 12: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." Isn't that what you want is a crown of life? Well, now, listen: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." Now, look at that verse. It doesn't say, if he is tempted. It says, when he is tempted. You will be tempted. There's no way that you can live on God's green earth and not be tempted. Temptation is everywhere, and you'll feel it every day. And it is not a sin to be tempted. Jesus was tempted, yet without sin. Jesus was not a sinner. So you're going to be tempted. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I

am tempted of God: for God tempted no man with evil, neither can God be tempted with evil." Now, what does that mean? Well, God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. That's what it says in verse 13. You couldn't tempt God. Why? Because God is perfectly whole. He has no itch the devil can scratch. And God is perfectly holy. God can never, no never, no never, never, ever sin. It's impossible. For example, the Bible says it's impossible that God should lie. God cannot sin. Now, God cannot be tempted with evil because not only is He perfectly whole; He's perfectly holy. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. Now, we understand that, but also, God will not tempt anybody to sin. Now, God will test you, but God will not tempt you. When God tests you, it is to make you stand. When the devil tempts you, it is to make you fall. God will never solicit you to do evil. God will never willingly dangle a temptation to sin in front of you and induce you to sin. He never tempts anybody with evil. If God were to tempt you with evil, you would have a perfect alibi. You would say, "Well, who can resist God?" But so many people do. They want to blame God, and they say, "God, this is the way You made me." No, no, no. God never made you in such a way as to sin. Now, there are certain people who have perverted sexual appetites, and they say, "Well, that must be right because this is the way God made me." Well, try that with a pedophile who wants to prey on little children. Can't he say, "This is the way God made me"? Say that to a person who is a kleptomaniac. Can he not say, "This is the way God made me"? Say that to a man who is vengeful. Can he not say, "This is the way God made me"? I read in the newspaper yesterday about a man who solicited on the Internet for somebody to come so he could kill him and eat him. Did you read that? Good night! Well, I mean, after all, this man has an appetite to eat other people. Can he say, "This is the way God made me, and blame God"? No. God doesn't tempt any man with evil. If He did, we would have a perfect alibi. God cannot be tempted; neither tempts he any person. But now, watch this. Look at it in verse 14: "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust...—underscore that—his own lust, and enticed. And when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

Now, what we're going to have is the biography of a sin from the conception to the cradle to the coffin. You're going to see what sin is like right here in this particular passage of Scripture. So put away your excuses. You're going to be tempted. But God says here in this passage of Scripture that a temptation is like a seduction, just like a man may seduce a woman into sexual sin, or like a woman may allure and seduce a man into sexual sin. God uses that only as an illustration. He's not talking about sexual sin only, but He's talking about all kinds of sin, but He says it is a seductive thing.

Now, here are several points I want to lay upon your heart, because this is going to help you to understand the nature of a sin, the anatomy of a sin, and how to live in

victory.

I. There Is a Courtship That Leads to Consent

Point number one: There is a courtship that leads to consent. Now, the devil will court you. The devil will allure you. The devil will try to seduce you. Look at the Scripture again in verse 14: Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts...”—now, there’s the lust that’s in him, but there’s the drawing away that’s outside of him—“Every man is...drawn away of his own lusts, and enticed.” Now, this word drawn away is a word in the Greek language that has to do with a lure or a trap that a hunter might use or a fisher might use as he tries to entice the animal into the trap, entice the fish onto the bait. It was used of fishing. They fished with lures in Bible times. Of course, they used bait like worms and other bits of food to entice the fish.

I grew up down in Florida as a poor boy. We never had rods and reels and plugs and to do fly fishing and to do bait casting. We just dangled something in the water till we could hook a fish. But one day I went out with some men as a young man. I was still a college student. And they put a rod and reel in my hand and put a wooden plug there on the end of that line, and said, “We’re going out to cast for bass.” And, very frankly, I looked at that piece of wood with the hooks in it—it was painted—and I thought, no fish can be this dumb—no fish can be this dumb. And so, the men walked up and down the banks, and I’m out there by myself meditating and thinking and trying to act macho like I know what I’m doing, throwing that thing out in the water and snarling it up and unreeling it and reeling it back, throwing it in the water. And I threw it about as far as from here to that camera, and it landed in the water and lay there for a while, and then, all of a sudden, the water just exploded, and I saw that bass as he came out of that water and just actually knocked the plug out like that away in the water, and the hook was set, and boy, he started talking. My heart began to beat like that. I thought, good night, it’s happening. I’ve caught a fish. I didn’t even reel him in; I just backed up and dragged him out. There he is flopping on the ground now. I thought, that’s an amazing thing. You see, what happened is this: That plug was out there by that lily pad just going like that, and there was something in that bass, a desire, that said, “I want that.” Now, he was enticed, but he had to make a decision. And he made the decision on an inward desire. He said, “I want it.” And when he went after it, he’s hooked.

Have you ever thought why they call prostitutes hookers? Hookers. You see, there’s the flirtation. There’s the enticement. She’s standing on the street corner. And here comes the dumb fish, and he says, “I want that.” He’s hooked. But he has to have that inward desire. “Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts, and enticed.” There has to be, first of all, the courtship that leads to a consent. The problem begins on the inside. You see, it takes two. Now, the devil may tempt, but you have to

agree; you have to consent. The devil will court you, but there must be a consent. The problem really comes from the inside first. Put this scripture down—Mark chapter 7, beginning in verse 21: “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts”—you know why you think evil thoughts? You’ve got an evil mind—“adulteries, fornications, murders. Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these things come from within, and defile the man.” It starts in your heart. Sin is an inside job. “Every man is enticed—yes, he is—when he is drawn away of his own lusts.”

When I was in high school, I read a book. The title of the book was “The Big Con”—C-O-N—talking about confidence games, confidence men, men who trick people and get money from them. And the idea is that many times innocent people are caught up in these confidence games. But this was written by a former confidence man, and he said it’s impossible to trick a person in a confidence game—now listen to this—unless he, first of all, has a touch of larceny in his heart. A man may walk up to an elderly woman in a supermarket with an envelope full of money, and he says, “Would you look at this. I found this money on the floor. What do you think I ought to do with it?” “Oh, my, I’ve never seen so much money. I don’t know what to do with it.” “Would you help me? Look, if we can’t find out who it belongs to, I’ll divide it up with you, but I need your help. I need a witness here. I just found this money.” Her heart begins to say, “Man, I could get that money.” She knows it’s not hers, but there’s a little touch of larceny there. Now, he doesn’t ask her to steal. He says, “Would you help me? And if we can’t find them, I’ll just give you half of it.” She says, “Yeah, all right.” She gets to thinking about what she could do. He says, “I’ll tell you what. So you can trust me, and I can trust you, I’ll let you hold the money. But you go to the bank and get some of your money out, and let me hold that, so I know that I can trust you, and you know that you can trust me.” And so, she’s goes to the bank and withdraws \$500 or a \$1,000, and gives it to him. And he says, “Now, you hold the envelope with the money in it, and I’ll hold this, and I’ll go find out what we ought to do.” That’s the last she sees of him. And she opens her envelope and it’s full of just plain paper, no money at all. He’s done the switch-a-roo on her. He’s tricked her. But he could not have tricked her, he could not have conned her, unless, first of all, down in her sweet, little old heart there was a desire to get something that really wasn’t hers. Now, you could never convince her that there was a touch of larceny there, but, you see, sin comes out of the heart, out of the heart of man. The devil cannot be the con man that he is without your consent. There’s the courtship that leads to the consent. You must say, “I do.” It takes two. There may be the temptation, but you must consent, and you do that on the basis of your own lusts. Now, when the temptation comes, there is no sin, but when you say, “I do,” then you become compliant and complicit in that sin. Now, folks, you are free up until this point to choose, but you’re not

free to choose the consequences of your choice. Once you take the bait, once the hook is set, there is a conception that takes place. First of all, there is the courtship that leads to consent.

II. There Is a Consent That Leads to Conception

Second point: There is a consent that leads to the conception. Now, look, if you will, in verse 15: “Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin.” You see, first there’s the courtship. You’re drawn away and enticed. You say, “I do.” There’s a consent. And then there’s a conception. A sin is born. The mother of that sin is inward lust. The father of that sin is outward temptation. But it takes two to bring about a conception, and one of them is you. And without that inward desire, you could not have that conception. And so, when that inward lust and that outward temptation get together, an unholy child is born, and that unholy child is sin. Now, I’m not talking about literal babies being unholy. There are no illegitimate children. There are a lot of illegitimate parents. Every little child has a right to be born and loved, no matter what the circumstances of the conception. So don’t get confused now and think I’m talking about literal children. James is using an analogy. He’s saying a sin is like that. First of all, there is the enticement. And then, there is the agreement. And then, there is the conception. That inward lust, the mother of sin, that outward temptation come together and there is a conception. And when a child is conceived, often there is great joy. People say, “Oh, wonderful. Look, a baby.” Babies are beautiful, and sin sometimes seems to be so beautiful, so wonderful, such a joyful thing. “Why, there’s that old, ugly pastor up there telling me that sin is wrong. Why, if he only knew how much fun I’m having.” It seems so good. It seems so natural. It seems so wonderful. It seems so fulfilling—the result of a fatal attraction and a flawed appetite.

III. There Is the Conception That Leads to Consummation

Let’s move on to the third thing. Now, first of all, there is the courtship that leads to the consent. Then, there’s the consent that leads to the conception. And then, there is the conception that leads to the consummation. Now, look again in verse 15. Look at it: “Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin—now, the child of lust is sin—and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” The grandchild of lust is death because now your baby is going to have a child, and your baby’s child is named death. We’re talking about sin now. We’re talking about an analogy. “Lust, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin.” The child of lust is sin, and the child of sin is death. Now, the Scripture says, “and sin, when it is finished...” That means, when it’s full-grown. Sin, in its inception seems beautiful, pleasant, alluring, and nice. You must have been a beautiful baby, but, baby, look at you now. You have to see, take the long look. This is

what God is saying: that you can't just take it for what you see to begin with. The Bible says, "The bread of deceit is sweet, but afterward a man's mouth will be filled with gravel." Former pastor of this church, once removed, Dr. Robert G. Lee, used to say, "You can eat the devil's corn if you want to, but he will choke you on the cob." Now, the devil is very sinister and very slick. He seduces. And you have to look past the immediate conception to the consummation. "Sin, when it is full-grown; sin, when it is finished..." Let's take some example of that.

For example, let's take beverage alcohol. A lot of beverage alcohol will be advertised today on television. The best ads are always the liquor ads. You see at Christmastime those Clydesdales going through the snow, the jingle bells. Isn't that a beautiful ad? There's that house there and the light streaming through in the Christmas window, and those big horses are prancing along. It's sort of a Christmas card brought to you by Budweiser. They're beautiful. They don't show you a drunkard in the gutter covered with vomit and flies. They don't show you that. They wouldn't show you sin when it is finished. They wouldn't show you a teenager with her face all sliced up having gone through the windshield on a Saturday night. They wouldn't show you that. God will show you that. Listen. Proverbs 23, verses 30 to 32: "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red—oh, look at how it sparkles—when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright." The bubbly, they call it—the bubbly. By the way, he's talking about fermented wine. You know, there's wine that is fermented and wine that's not fermented. Jesus did not drink fermented wine. He did not say that you should drink fermented wine. The Bible says, when it's fermented, leave it alone. Don't even look at it. "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright—now, listen to this—At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder." You're playing with a rattlesnake. God says leave it alone. Now, you say, "Well, I drink. I'm having a big time and I enjoy it." "Lust, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin." Well, friend, you need to see the finished product. You know, they used to have an ad—I think Old Milwaukee—where a bunch of guys are out in a bass boat. And they've caught some fish and they're frying the fish. They're there on the seashore. There's a campfire and good buddies are there, and one of them holds up a foamy brew, and he says, "Man, it doesn't get any better than this." You remember that ad? Well, he's right. It always gets worse. It doesn't get any better than that.

Back when I was a pastor in Fort Pierce, Florida, there was an old Milwaukee ad, I think, or one that said Falstaff—I can't remember which. It said, "The finest product of the brewer's art." Well, I got an artist to paint a billboard to put on our parking lot, and it was a billboard that showed a couple of garbage cans. There was an old drunk on the ground with a broken bottle at his hand, a beer bottle. There was a rat, a king-size rat, there alongside of him. And this old drunk—and I don't say that disparaging to him, but

just to let you know the picture I was painting for the kids—is there in this back alley with his broken beer bottle, lying on the ground with a big rat there by him. And I had put under there, “The finished product of the brewer’s art.” Not the finest, but the finished. I wanted the boys and girls to see this when they came to Sunday school. I got a call on the telephone, and the man was the distributor for that brand of beer. He said, “Are you Pastor da-da-da-da?” I said, “Yes, I am.” He said, “I need to talk with you.” I said, “Fine. I’ll meet you in my office in five minutes.” I went down there as fast as I could. I wanted to meet him. I said, “What do you want to talk about?” He said, “You’ve got a sign out there in your parking lot that I believe discriminates against my product.” I said, “Mister, your product is brewed with tears, and flavored with death, and thickened with blood. And if I were you, I’d fall on my knees and ask God Almighty to have mercy upon me and forgive me.” He said, “Wow.” He said, “I don’t believe I’m going to get anywhere with you.” I said, “Not if you think that what I’ve done is wrong.” He said, “Well, all right then.” He said, “I believe that’s grounds for a lawsuit.” I said, “So do I.” I said, “I want you to sue me.” And I said, “I want to get this picture of my parking lot on the front page of the newspaper.” And I said, “You know, you’ve got a lot of nerve. Up and down the highway there are billboards that say drink it. Coming in on the television there are ads that say drink it. In the newspapers there are ads that say drink it. Everywhere—drink it, drink it, drink it. And I put up one sign on a parking lot and you don’t like it. I’ll make a deal with you. You take your signs down; I’ll take mine down.” That’s the last I heard of him. The finished product—the finished product. “Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” At the end, it bites like a serpent, stings like an adder. They cannot afford to advertise this as it really is.

What about immorality? Everything today is done on the basis of either liquor or sex. What does the Bible say about the end of immorality—not the beginning, but the end? Look in Proverbs chapter 5, verses 3 through 5: “For the lips of a strange woman...”—what does he mean by a strange woman? Not that she’s from Mars. That isn’t what it means. It means somebody who’s not your wife. She’s a stranger to your home—“For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb”—there she is, old honey lips. Her mouth is smoother than oil. Boy, is she a fast talker. She is slick. There’s old honey lips. There’s old smooth lips. But now notice this—but her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell.”

Now, here’s a boy walking through the streets of Memphis. Standing on the street corner is one of these hookers. She’s got her face all painted. She looks at him. Something in him says, “I want that.” He’s hooked. And when he is participating in this illicit thing, he may say, “Hey, this feels good; this is fine,” but the Bible says her end is “bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet lead you into hell.” Listen. God says, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” God says, “Flee fornication.” You’re not

smarter than God. You're not going to break God's laws. "Every man is enticed when he's drawn away of his own lusts." "Every man is drawn away of his own lusts, and enticed. And lust, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished—when it is finished, when it is finished—bringeth forth death." "The wages of sin is death." "The soul that sinneth, it shall surely die." Now, you may not agree with me. You may say, "Pastor, I don't agree with you." That's your privilege—that's your privilege.

Let me give you another scripture. "There's a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is the ways of death." You can take your pride. You can take your mind. You can say, "I repudiate what the man is saying this morning. I have certain desires. I'm going to fulfill them. I'm going to live this way." Okay. You say, "It seems right to me. I'm the judge of my own conduct." Fine. You say, "I'm sincere." Well, friend, you're sincerely wrong. "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." "Sin, when it is finished..." There is no way possible that you're going to outsmart God.

Now, what have I said this morning? Look—look. There is a courtship. The devil is out there to seduce. There's a courtship. But that courtship must lead to a consent. You must say, "I do." And you will say, "I do," if there's something in you that agrees with the temptation, the allurements. Once there is this consent, then there is a conception. "Lust, when it hath conceived..." Then, a child is born. I'm not talking about a human child. I'm talking about sin, the coming together of a flawed appetite and a fatal attraction. And when these come together, there's a conception. And the child of that conception is sin, and the grandchild of that conception is death. There is a courtship, a consent, a conception, and a consummation. And you're not going to break that chain. I don't care how smart you are. I don't care how wise you are. You may be a lawyer. You may be a physician. You may be a banker. You may be a physicist. You may be an actor. You may be a football hero. You are not going to break that chain of events. You're not going to do it. I don't care who you are. You may be going high, wide, and handsome now. You may be saying, "What a beautiful baby this is." Wait till it's full grown. "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

Conclusion

Now, how are we going to wrap this up? Well, listen. You're not going to do away with temptation. Temptation is there. Even if you're saved, you're going to be tempted. Jesus was tempted. Temptation is in the air. So how are you going to live victoriously? Well, you're not going to be able to escape temptation, so you're going to have to be changed on the inside, because sin is an inside job. Now, how are you going to be changed on the inside?

There was an evangelist. He's in heaven now. His name, Lester Roloff. Any of you ever heard Lester Roloff preach? A great man of God. Lester Roloff used to tell a story, a parable about Dr. Law and Dr. Grace. There was a man. His eyes had been reading pornography. His hands had been handling filth. His feet had been going to wrong places. He knows that he's sick, so he goes to the doctor. The doctor's name is Dr. Law.

He says, "Dr. Law. I've got a problem with my eyes, my hands, and my feet."

Dr. Law examines him, and Dr. Law says, "No, the problem is not with your eyes. It's with your heart.

He said, "No, doctor, it's my eyes. They..."

"No, it's your heart."

"Well, doctor, look. My hands—my hands are handling filthy things and taking things and doing things. My hands are wrong. I need help for my hands."

He says, "It's not your hands. It's your heart."

"Are you sure, Dr. Law? My feet. I've been going to wrong places. Dr. Law, I need something done to my feet."

Dr. Law says, "It's not your feet. It is your heart. Believe me."

"Well, Dr. Law, give me some medicine."

"Nope, I don't do that. I only diagnose."

"Well, Dr. Law, give me some exercise."

"I said, I only diagnose."

"Well, give me your prognosis."

"You're going to die. You're going to die. You've got a bad heart. You're going to die."

"Well, Dr. Law, isn't there any hope at all?"

"Oh, yes, there is some hope."

"What is that?"

"You need a heart transplant."

"Do you do transplants?"

"Oh, no. I only diagnose."

"Well, is there a doctor available?"

"He's right across the hall."

"Well, what's his name?"

"Dr. Grace."

"Will I have to make an appointment?"

"No, just knock on the door. He'll come to the door."

"You mean I don't have to make an appointment?"

"No."

“Well, will he receive me?”

“He’s never turned away a patient.”

“Well, what will he cost?”

“Not a thing in the world.”

“You mean he’ll see me right now, not turn me away, and he can give me a new heart?”

“Yes.”

“Well, Dr. Law, will it hurt?”

“Yeah, it might, but he’ll give you a new heart.”

And so the man goes and knocks on the door. The most kindly looking man he’s ever seen, not nearly as stern as Dr. Law, comes to the door, and says, “Come in.”

“Dr. Grace, Dr. Law says I need a new heart. Is that right?”

“Yes, you do.”

“Can you give me one?”

“Yes, I will.”

“Are you going to put me asleep?”

“Nope. I’m going to do it while you’re wide awake. Get on the table.”

And Dr. Grace reaches into the chest, and he pulls out a heart and holds it up. And you look at it. It is so vile. It stinks terrible. He says, “Is that my heart? It’s deceitful and desperately wicked.”

Well, he said, “Didn’t Dr. Law tell you that? That’s why you’ve been doing all those things. Now, I’m going to give you a new heart.”

And he puts a new heart in this man’s chest. Immediately he feels a new life pulsating through him. And now the things he once loved he now hates, and the things he once hated he now loves. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation.” God says, “I will give you a new heart.”

And, friend, the only way you’re going to change your behavior is to change from the inside. When you give your heart to Jesus, I don’t mean that you’re going to sprout wings and get a halo. You will begin to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But rather than running to sin, you’ll be running from it. And you’ll have a new heart. You’ll have a new desire. Let me tell you something. Look at me. I sin all I want to, because I don’t want to. I don’t want to. I have a new heart. I don’t want to. The problem with sin is on the inside.

Now, if you are a Christian and you’ve not been living victoriously, it is because you’re not been yielding your life to Jesus and letting His life express itself through you. “Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts, and enticed. And lust, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” “But if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature....”

Friend, the only way you will ever be changed is from the inside out. So much modern-day religion is just behavior modification. That won't do it. You can't purify the water by painting the pump. You need a new heart. Does that make sense? Does it? Well, friend, Dr. Law says, "You need a new heart." That's what the law of God says. Dr. Grace says, "I'll give you one."

Bow your heads in prayer. Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. And if you know that you're saved, begin to pray for those around about you. And, precious friend, if you don't have the absolute assurance of your salvation today, I want to guide you in a prayer. And I want you to just knock on the door of Dr. Grace right now, and I want you to imagine him right now opening the door to you. Would you pray a prayer like this: Lord Jesus, I need a new heart. I want You to come into my life and change me from the inside. Take control of my life. Begin to make me the person You want me to be. Forgive my sin. I have failed. Forgive my sin. The problem is not my hands and my feet and my eyes; it's my heart. Cleanse me. Save me, Jesus. I believe You paid for my sin with Your blood on the cross. And now, by an act of faith, I receive You, Jesus, into my life as my Lord and Savior. Thank You for saving me. And now, Lord, take my new heart, and begin to make me the person You want me to be, and give me the courage to make it public. In Your name I pray. Amen.

"Pastor Rogers, if I prayed that prayer, did Jesus give me a new heart? Did He save me?" Not if you merely repeated words, no. Repeating words never saved anybody. But if you were sincere, He saved you, for the Bible says, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." And if today you said, "Oh yes, yes, I'm giving my heart to Jesus Christ," I'm going to give you a chance to show it by coming forward. We're going to sing in a moment an invitational hymn. And ministers from our church will be standing at the head of each of these aisles all the way across the front to welcome those of you who'll be coming forward. And if you're in the balcony and are making a decision, if you're on this side over here, there'll be a minister standing under that banner that says Redeemer, or on this side there'll be one to welcome you under the banner that says Messiah. And, as we sing this invitational hymn, I want you to leave your seat and come forward. There's something about coming forward that settles it and seals it, that shames the devil, and gives glory to God. Jesus has said, "If you're ashamed of me and of my word before this sinful and adulterous generation, I'll be ashamed of you when I come in the glory of the Father with the holy angels." But He said, "If you'll confess me before me, I'll confess you before the Father." Now, during the invitation, the devil will move up alongside of you and whisper in your ear, and say, "Don't do it. If you're going to do it, do it another Sunday, but not today." And he'll give you some silly excuse, but he can't give you any reason. I want you to do this morning what you would do if you knew this were the last service you'd ever be in—and it may

be. I want you to leave your seat, come forward. “Now, Pastor, what would I say when I go down there?” Say this: “I’m trusting Jesus.” “Well, Pastor, what will happen?” We’ll rejoice, we’ll give you some Scripture to stand on, answer any questions we can answer, and seal it in prayer.

Others of you need a church home. Maybe you’ve been saved for a long time, but you need a church home. If this is where you worship and where God speaks to you, most likely this is where you need to belong. I want to invite you to come forward at the same time these others are coming. And if you know that you’re saved, really know it, then I want you to say, “I want to place my membership here,” and they’ll tell you how you may become a member of this wonderful church. Now, respectfully, I’m going to ask that no one leave during the invitation unless it is an emergency. Your leaving will disturb other worshipers. We’ll be at the benediction in a few moments. Be in a spirit of prayer. If you’re with a friend that needs to come forward, you may come forward with them. How beautiful that is.

Now, let’s bow our heads in prayer one more time. And, church, join me as we pray for these. Lord, I just pray now that You will open the hearts and draw men and women, boys and girls, to Jesus, and, Lord, that people might receive today a new heart, a new life, a new love, and, Lord, learn to live victoriously. And, oh, God, give the increase today and draw people to Jesus.

Let’s stand together, folks, as we sing. You step out and come on this stanza. Right now you come.

The Blame Game

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: September 15, 1991

Main Scripture Text: James 1:12–15

“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.”

JAMES 1:13

Outline

Introduction

- I. A Definite Possibility
- II. A Divine Impossibility
 - A. It Is Impossible to Tempt God with Evil
 - B. It Is Impossible for God to Tempt Man with Evil
- III. A Direct Responsibility
 - A. Courtship
 - B. Consent
 - C. Conception
 - D. Completion

Conclusion

- A. Confess Sin
- B. Receive the Lord Jesus

Introduction

James chapter 1 is our scripture this morning. Would you find it? James chapter 1—and in a moment, we’re going to begin reading in verse 12. And, what I want to talk to you today about is accepting responsibility for your own actions, for your own sin. The title of our message is “The Blame Game.”

You know, that’s the oldest game. That’s been around longer than Monopoly—the blame game. It’s so old it began in the Garden of Eden. And, after Adam and Eve had sinned in the Garden of Eden, the Bible says that God came walking in the midst of the garden and He cried out for Adam, “Adam, where are you?” (Genesis 3:9) It wasn’t the voice of a detective; it was the voice of a brokenhearted God. “Adam, where are you?” (Genesis 3:9) And finally, Adam came out from his hiding place in the foliage in the bushes, and God confronted him with his sin. And, do you know what Adam did? He tried to put the blame on Eve or else the blame on God, if you listen to it. He’s either blaming God or he’s blaming Eve, because he said, “God, the woman you gave to me—

she caused me to do this. The woman you gave me. Now, either it's her fault or your fault, but it's not my fault. The woman you gave me." (Genesis 3:12) And, when God confronted the woman, what did she say? She said, "Well, it was the serpent. He's the one that beguiled me." (Genesis 3:13) So, Adam put the blame on God or on Eve, and Eve put the blame on the serpent. Of course, the serpent didn't have a leg to stand on so, I mean, just from one to the other, the blame is just passed on and on.

And, you know, friend, putting the blame on someone else rather than accepting responsibility is a very dangerous thing. And, sometimes it may seem humorous, but here's what God says about the whole thing. Look, if you will, in James 1:12: "*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation*"—now, the word *temptation* at this particular place means a person whose life is tested—"for when he is tried"—that is, when he is tested—"he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him"—so if you have a test and you've passed the test; if you have difficulties, and trials, and heartaches, and sorrow, perplexities, and you keep your eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ, there's a crown waiting for you. It's the crown of life. But now, he talks about something else in verse 13—"Let no man say when he is tempted"—now, he's not talking about testing, but he's talking about an inducement to evil—"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust"—do you see it? Underscore that phrase "his own lust." I want you to see, my friend, that sin is an inside job—"every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." (James 1:12–15)

I was reading in our local newspaper in July, just a few months ago, an article entitled "A Nation of Victims." Now, this article was written by a Mr. John Taylor. The title: "A Nation of Victims," and the byline is this: "American's mindset: 'Don't blame me for what I've done.'" That is, in this article, it went on to show that we, in America today, don't see ourselves as guilty, as sinners. If we do anything wrong, we're not to blame; it's somebody else's fault. And then, he mentions some people—like Rose Cipollone, who is suing the Liggett Company, the tobacco company, because she has lung cancer. Now, she has since died of lung cancer, but her heirs are continuing the suit, and it's now before the Supreme Court—whether or not these manufacturers of cigarettes could be held accountable for this woman who has lung cancer, notwithstanding that she has smoked a pack and a half of cigarettes every day for forty years. And, written on the pack of cigarettes is a warning from the Surgeon General. Plus, the American Cancer Society has been saying over and over again, if you smoke cigarettes, you may get lung cancer. There's an increased danger of lung cancer. Over and over and over again, that is said. Plus the fact that all of the news reports on radio and television—she's seen all

of that. But, what she has said is, “Never mind the fact that I’m the one who has smoked a pack and a half of cigarettes. It’s their fault that I have lung cancer.” Now, my dear friend, I’m certainly not taking the side of the cigarette industry. A friend said a long time ago, “Well, if God didn’t want us to smoke cigarettes, why did He make tobacco?” And, one of my close friends said, “God made that stuff to kill insects and not men.” Well, dear friend, God doesn’t want you to smoke cigarettes, but you can’t blame the cigarette company if you’re the one that smokes.

And then, in this same article by Mr. Taylor, he talked about a man named James Carter, a student at the University of Virginia. And, there was a drug bust in his frat house there at the University of Virginia, and the police came in and arrested this young man for dealing drugs. Well, the father of this young man, Fred Carter, was furious, and he wanted to know why his son had been arrested. He wanted to know why the police did not go to the University of Richmond and make a drug bust there or why they didn’t go to Norfolk State University there. Was he upset with his son for jeopardizing his future? Was he upset with the fact that here was a young man who was clearly transgressing the law? No! He was upset with the police for making a drug bust there rather than somewhere else. He felt that his son had been discriminated against; his son was a victim.

And then, all of us have read... All of these things are in that article that was in the newspaper. Richard Berendzen, the former president of American University, resigned recently after it has been discovered that he’s been making obscene phone calls from his office. He’s picking up his phone—now, this is a university president—and calling people and making obscene phone calls. Well, a doctor wrote in *The Washington Post*—a doctor by the name of Kenneth Grundfast—wrote in *The Washington Post* that Berendzen deserved public sympathy because he was the victim of an obsessive-compulsive disorder, which is—and I quote: “caused more by abnormal DNA sequences within an individual’s chromosomes than by the moral lapses commonly described as ‘wicked hostility and turpitude.’” That is, “the man is not to be blamed. He’s to be pitied. It’s in his chromosomes. It’s in his DNA. That’s what’s caused him to pick up the phone and make these dirty phone calls.” And then, this doctor, Dr. Grundfast, went on to say, “The tragedy is more ours than his.” We may be the weak and misguided, not Berendzen. Do you see that? I mean, the problem is not that man’s; it’s society’s.

And, it gets worse. In New York City, a man deliberately jumped in front of a subway, and he was mutilated. But, he sued the city and collected six hundred and fifty thousand dollars because the train didn’t stop fast enough. That’s right—jumped off the tracks deliberately and the city is sued because they did not stop fast enough. And, it goes on to say that they have all of these appliances and so forth—if you hurt yourself with an appliance, the lawyers today say, “Come see us, and we’ll get you some money.” And,

they have a thing now called “refrigerator races,” where a bunch of beered-up guys strap refrigerators on their back and they have races to see who can run the fastest carrying a refrigerator. And, would you believe that some have entered lawsuits against the refrigerator company because they do not have sufficient warnings on those refrigerators that tell you that you can hurt yourself in a refrigerator race carrying that thing on your back? I mean, everybody is to be blamed but us. Now folks, if you get in a refrigerator race carrying a refrigerator on your back, you’re liable to get hurt. They don’t have to print that on the refrigerator to keep you from being guilty. But, the whole thing—I’m telling you, it’s as old as the Garden of Eden. It began so long ago, when Adam said, “Well, God, the woman you gave me...” and the woman said, “Well, the serpent—he beguiled me, and I did sin.” (Genesis 3:12–13)

I. A Definite Possibility

Now, having said all that, let’s see what God has to say about it here in the book of James. First of all, I want you to notice what I want to call “a definite possibility.” Look in verse 13: *“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.”* (James 1:13) Do you see that? Now, it doesn’t say, “if he’s tempted”; it says, “when he is tempted.” You are going to be tempted, my friend, and being saved does not keep you from being tempted. As a matter of fact, it may increase your temptation. The Lord Jesus was tempted. You’re no better than He. And, to be tempted is not a sin. He *“was [tempted] in all points...like as we are, yet without sin.”* (Hebrews 4:15) As a matter of fact, when you become the friend of God, you’re going to become what? The enemy of Satan. Leonard Ravenhill said, “When God opens the windows of heaven to bless us, the devil opens the doors of hell to blast us.” And so, when you become a friend of God, yes, you’ll become the enemy of Satan.

I heard about two men who were out duck hunting one time—a man and his servant. And, the servant was a Christian, and the wealthy man who had the servant was not a Christian. But, they were good friends. And, they were out duck hunting, and the man who was not a Christian said, “Sam,” said, “you’re always talking about the devil after you.” He said, “The devil’s never after me. You claim to be a Christian, and I’m not a Christian.” Said, “Why is it that, therefore, I’m not a Christian and you have more trouble with the devil than I have?” He said, “Well, mister, my boss,” he said, “if we’re out here shooting,” he said, “we shoot two ducks, and,” said, “one of them is wounded and one of them is already dead. Which one are we going after?” He said, “Well, I guess the wounded one.” He said, “That’s right.” He said, “The devil knows you’re a dead duck.”

Now, my dear friend, if you’re just a dead duck, don’t worry about it. If you’ve never met the devil, you and the devil have been going in the same direction. But, you turn around and try and live for God, and you’re going to meet the devil—you really are.

You're going to meet him. And, being saved is not going to take away your temptation. Just get that out of your mind. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians chapter 10: *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that [you're] able; but will with the temptation...make a way [of] escape."* (1 Corinthians 10:13) Now, get ready—get ready. Satan wants to sabotage your life. And, in this day and this age, you're going to be faced with unbelievable temptations—and many times from areas that you never suspected.

All right, so, first of all, just write down "a definite possibility"—"a definite possibility: verse 13." That is that you'll be tempted. *"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God"* (James 1:13)—a definite possibility. When, not if—*when* he is tempted.

II. A Divine Impossibility

But now, secondly, not only a definite possibility but a divine impossibility. Now, what is the divine impossibility? Again in verse 13: *"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."* (James 1:13) Let me say that again: *"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."* (James 1:13)

Now, I want you to get this plain—that it is our nature to want to blame someone else, and especially do we want to blame God. Now, how does man blame God for his sin? How do we play the blame game? We put the blame on God. "Well," we say, "God, you created or allowed the circumstances. That is, whatever it is, you created the environment. Maybe I was born in the ghetto, or maybe my mother wouldn't let me push my pabulum off the high chair, or maybe my dad was overly strict, or maybe this or maybe that. But God, you created or you allowed the environment. Or else, God, you made me the way that I am. It's in my genes. It's in my chromosomes. You made me. You didn't give me enough strength, God. Lord, it's your fault."

A. It Is Impossible to Tempt God with Evil

Now, in answer to that, James says there are two things that are impossible. Here is divine impossibility: it is impossible, number one, that God can be tempted with evil. It is not possible for you to tempt God. Nobody could ever tempt God. The devil could never tempt God to sin. Why? Because God is perfectly whole and God is perfectly holy. Now, what I mean by God is perfectly whole—God has every need within Himself. God has no itch the devil can scratch. The devil doesn't have anything God wants, needs, or desires. He is perfectly whole, and He is perfectly holy. He is the complete other. He is the antithesis of sin. So, put it down: God cannot be tempted with sin.

Now, you say, "Well, wasn't Jesus tempted and wasn't Jesus God?" Yes, Jesus was God, but He was also man. And, in His humanity, Jesus was tested, but Jesus had no

desire to sin, either. He said, “The devil comes, and he finds nothing in me.” (John 14:30) You see, God cannot be tempted, induced, to do evil. Jesus never had a desire to do evil that He overcame. He never desired to do evil. He was tested, but He never even had the desire to do it—not at all. There was nothing in the Lord Jesus Christ that Satan could get his hands on. Jesus never sinned. It’s impossible to tempt God with sin. That’s one impossibility.

B. It Is Impossible for God to Tempt Man with Evil

Now, secondly, it is impossible for God to tempt man with evil—not because God can’t do it but because God will not do it. God will never tempt you to do evil. God will test you, but God will not tempt you. And, I want you to see the difference. God will test you. God tests us to make us stand. Satan tempts us to make us stumble. A testing is there that we might stand. A temptation is there that we might stumble.

Now, God does test you. *The faith that can’t be tested can’t be trusted.* God will test you over and over again, but God will not tempt you to do evil. If God would ever tempt you to do evil, well, you would have the perfect alibi. You would say, “After all, who can resist God? I mean, who is stronger than God?” What an alibi that would be to say, “God, you’re the One who tempted me.” But, you will never ever be able to shift the blame on God. You’ll not be able to say, “God, it’s the circumstances that you allowed. It’s the woman that you gave me” or, “It’s the way that you built me.” Friend, listen, you’ll never have victory over sin and our society will never be what it ought to be until we stop calling men “ill” and start calling them “evil,” ’til we stop calling men “weak” and start calling them “wicked,” ’til we stop trying to blame others and circumstances and society and accept the blame for sin.

It’s so easy to blame someone else. Take a man, for example, that’s a drunkard. You say, “Why do you drink?” He said, “Well, do you know the woman I live with? She nags, nags, nags, nags. And, why do I drink? Because I live with a nagging woman.” So, you go to the woman. You say, “Why do you nag, nag, nag, nag, nag?” She said, “Why? Why, if you had to live with a drunkard like that, you would nag him, too.” And so, she has an excuse for nagging. He has an excuse for drinking. But, she’s guilty for nagging, and he’s guilty for drinking. We always want to put the blame on someone else.

III. A Direct Responsibility

So, what we see, first of all, is a definite possibility. Then, we see a divine impossibility, and that tightens the focus to bring us to what I really want to say, and that is a direct responsibility. We’ve seen a possibility, an impossibility; now we’re going to see a responsibility. And, I want you to see that responsibility in verses 14–15. Now remember, this isn’t just what God has said; it is what God is saying. It’s not what God

said a long time ago to somebody else; it's what God is saying this morning to me and God is saying to you. *"Every man"*—and, by the way, that includes every woman, too. It's used in the generic sense: *"every person"*—*"is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own [lusts], and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."* (James 1:14–15)

Now, what we're going to see here is that sin is an inside job. And, a man falls into sin very much like a man or a woman is seduced into sexual immorality, and that's the illustration—that's the figure of speech—that James is using. Now, look at this scripture. Keep your Bible right here, and look at this scripture. And, what you're going to see is the biography of a sin, and it's very much like an immoral relationship.

A. **Courtship**

For example, it begins with a courtship. The devil will court you. Temptation will court you. So, first of all, the courtship. Look in verse 14: *"every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust."* (James 1:14)

Now, the word "drawn away" there is a very interesting word. It's a technical word. It's a word that is used for a fisherman who uses a lure to catch a fish, or perhaps somebody who uses a method to bait a trap. But, let's go back to the fisherman. Here's a bass fisherman. He gets just the right lure. He goes just to the right spot. He waits 'til just the right moment. And, he throws that lure out there, and it drops on the water. He lets it settle just enough; he knows just how much. And then, just at the right moment, he gives it a little twitch to make it seem alive. Then, he'll twitch it again—pull it in and twitch it again. And, there's an old bass there lurking under a log, and his sensitivity and sensibilities were stirred when that thing plopped on the water. And, he puts that fish eye up there, and he looks at it and he sees it wiggle. He thinks it's the favorite whatever-it-is that he loves to eat. And, there's something in that old bass that says, "I want that," and he goes for it. He swallows it, and he's hooked; and the fight is on. Now, the word here—*"every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed"* (James 1:14); "drawn away" and "enticed"—that's the word here for a fisherman throwing a lure into the water. But now, let me tell you something: Whose fault is it that that bass is caught? "Well," you say, "it's the fisherman's fault." Partly, but it's also the bass's fault. There is something in the bass that says, "I want that!" His own inner desire hooks him.

By the way, they call prostitutes what? "Hookers." You know, a man is stupid as a bass sometimes. He says, "I want that! I desire that!" Now, yes, she's standing on the street corner trying to flag him down, but there's something in him that responds. The Bible calls it "his own lust." (James 1:14) All temptation begins with a flirtation. The devil tangles some kind of bait out there, but you can't blame the devil because the Bible says there's something in you that responds. You see, the devil can strike and throw the

match, but it must find the gasoline of an unholy desire. The Bible calls that “your own lust,” (James 1:14) and the word *lust* here doesn’t necessarily mean sexual lust. But, the Lord Jesus gave a litany of evil things, and He said in Mark 7:23: “*All these...things come from within, and defile the man.*” (Mark 7:23) They don’t come from without. Sin is an inside job. The devil knows what it takes to get you.

When I was in high school, I read a book, and the title of the book was *The Big Con*. It talks about confidence men. I read it with interest. It’s incredible some of the confidence schemes that people have to separate people from their money. But, one of the philosophies—and it was written by an ex-confidence man, and he said this: he said, “It is virtually impossible to pull a confidence game, a fraud, on anyone unless they have”—are you ready for this?—“a touch of larceny within them. The only person that can be caught in a confidence game is the man who wants to get something quick—something that really doesn’t belong to him, get a little more profit, get a little more than he ought to get normally.” There is what they call “a touch of larceny.” And, if they find somebody with a touch of larceny, something on the inside, then they say, “I know I can take that person.” Now, the devil knows, dear friend, that there is in you that touch of larceny. “*Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*” (James 1:14) So, verse 14 is the courtship.

B. Consent

But, after the courtship there comes the consent. Now, the devil can tempt you; he can tempt me. As somebody said, “We can’t keep the birds from flying over our heads, but we can keep them from making a nest in our hair.” Now, what happens is, after the courtship there comes the consent. You must say, “I will” or, “I do,” and you decide then that you’re going to do that evil thing. That’s when the consent comes. And, you can’t blame the devil. You can’t say, “The devil made me do it.” Friend, listen, it takes two to create a sin, and one of them is you. You can’t just say, “The devil made me do it.”

Mary Crowley, a business lady, who’s now in heaven, from Dallas and a fine Christian friend of mine, said this—and I want to quote this to you: she said, “We are free up to the point of choice, but then the choice controls the chooser.” That’s a great quote: “We are free up to the point of choice, but then the choice controls the chooser.” You say, “I can drink if I want to.” That’s right. “I can do drugs if I want to.” That’s right. “I can commit adultery if I want to.” That’s right. “I can step out of this window if I want to.” That’s right. But, once I step out of that window, then—I made the choice—but now, the choice controls the chooser. Now friend, you are free to choose, but you are not free to control the consequences of your choice. The consequences of your choice are fixed there.

C. Conception

So, first of all, there comes the courtship, and then there comes the choice, or the consent. And then, there comes the conception. Look, if you will, in verse 15: *“Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin.”* (James 1:15)

Now, here’s what happens—here’s what happens. First of all, there’s the courtship: the devil dangles the bait. Then, there’s the consent: you say, “I will.” And then, there is the conception: a child is born. And, what is the child that is born? Look at it again: *“When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin.”* (James 1:15) Now, what is the mother of sin? Internal desire. What is the father of sin? External temptation. External temptation, internal desire—you have a mother and a father. It takes two to tango. You can’t just blame one; there are two. There is Satan. Yes, Satan is the one who tempts. But, my dear friend, *“every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. [And lust] when [it] hath conceived...bringeth forth sin.”* (James 1:14–15) And, the child of lust is sin.

And, you know, when a baby is born, we all rejoice, even when sin comes along. You know, sin seems good—sin seems good. Nobody thinks that sin is bad. If they thought sin was bad, they wouldn’t do it. To them sin seems good. A man who was on drugs said to me, “It’s a shame that drugs are against the law.” He said, “It’s so wonderful.” That’s what he said. He said, “It’s just a shame.” He said, “If you just knew how wonderful this is”—and he really believed it. He thought that was something great. A baby is born, and oh, what a beautiful baby! But, just keep on watching and you’ll say, “But baby, look at you now.”

D. Completion

But now, wait a minute—wait a minute. *“Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. [Lust,] when [it] hath conceived...bringeth forth sin”—now, watch; now, watch it—“and sin”—oh, friend, underscore this phrase—“when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”* (James 1:15) The child of lust is sin, and the child of sin is death. The grandchild of lust is death. That’s the devil’s LSD—lust, sin. You see it? *“Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.”* (James 1:15) There’s the courtship, the consent, the conception, the completion—the courtship, the consent, the conception, the completion. *“When it is finished”* (James 1:15) literally means “when it is complete.”

Now, you may be just living in one stage. Right now, maybe you’re living in the courtship stage, or maybe you’re living in the consent stage, or maybe you’re living in the conception stage, but you haven’t yet come to the completion stage. You haven’t seen sin when it is finished. You haven’t seen the whole thing. You need to see the finished product of the devil’s art. *Sin first fascinates, and then it assassinates. It first thrills, and then it kills.* Don’t get the idea that sin is not attractive. It’s very attractive.

Do you think that bass lure is attractive to a bass? Why, friend, there's a multimillion-dollar industry just connected to make that lure just everything that bass wants for its internal desires. And, the devil is working overtime to make sin attractive to you.

I heard of a man walking down a street one time. He had a basket on his arm, and in that basket were some beans. And, he was just throwing those pods of beans on the ground, and behind him were some pigs who were following along, eating those beans. Someone said to the man—said, "That's a strange way to feed those pigs. Why don't you feed them some other way?" He said, "I'm not feeding them." He said, "I'm taking them to the slaughterhouse." And, here they are just gobbling up those beans. Why, friend, the devil has a basket of beans, and we say, "Hey, that looks good. I like that. I enjoy that." But, you see, *"the wages of sin is death."* (Romans 6:23) *"The soul that sinneth, it shall [surely] die."* (Ezekiel 18:4, 20) *"Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."* (James 1:15)

Conclusion

And so, there it is. Listen, friend, there is—are you listening?—a definite possibility: you're going to be tempted. But, there is a divine impossibility, and that is that God can be tempted with evil or that God will tempt you with evil. And then, my dear friend, there is a direct responsibility, therefore: you can't blame God; you can't blame me; you can't blame environment; you can't blame circumstances. All of these things may be the devil's tool. Yes, they're all out there. Yes, there are temptations. Yes, they're strong. Yes, we ought to fight against them. Yes, we ought to remove them as much as we can. But mister, until you get down in your heart that sin is an inside job, you will never get released, relief, or victory, for Jesus said, *"All [of] these...things come from within, and [they] defile the man."* (Mark 7:23) *"Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own [lusts], and enticed."* (James 1:14) And teenager, it's time for you to stop blaming your parents. And mister, it's time for you to stop blaming your wife. And lady, it's time for you to stop blaming your children and society and say, "It's me, O God, standing in the need of prayer," because when you do that, for the first time, you are going to get ready for victory.

I want to tell you something, friend: Jesus Christ did not die to forgive mistakes; He died to forgive sin. And, until you admit it's sin, there's no hope for you. And, there's one thing that God will not accept for sin, and that is an alibi—that is an alibi. Now, you say, "Well, I'm doing fine right now, and I don't have Jesus. I'm not a Christian. I'm doing fine." You may be, because the Bible says, *"Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."* (James 1:15) There's a payday coming.

A. Confess Sin

Well, what's the answer? May I tell you, my dear friend, first of all, when we sin, confess

it. First John 1:9 says, “*If we confess our [sin]*”—not somebody else’s—“*if we confess our [sin], he is faithful and just to forgive us our [sin], and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*” (1 John 1:9)

B. Receive the Lord Jesus

And secondly—oh, listen; listen: receive the Lord Jesus. Why do people sin? Why does that bass go after that lure? Why? Because he’s hungry—he’s hungry. God knows you have needs. Do you know what sin is? Sin is an attempt to satisfy a legitimate need in the wrong way. That’s all sin is. You know, the devil is a pervert. Did you know that? He doesn’t have any raw material. He just takes your God-given desires and perverts them. He turns appetite into gluttony. He turns love into lust. All the devil can do is pervert what God has already done.

Now, my dear friend, do you know the way to keep an old bass from swallowing the wrong lure? Just simply help him to see the difference between the real and the counterfeit and to load up on the real. That’s all—just load up on the real. And, when you’ve found your satisfaction in the Lord Jesus Christ, you don’t envy sinners. I don’t envy sinners—I really don’t—because I’ve found satisfaction in the Lord Jesus.

*Friends all around me are trying to find
What the heart yearns for, by sin undermined;
I have the secret, I know where ’tis found:
Only true pleasures in Jesus abound.*

—HARRY D. LOES

The answer is Christ to forgive your sin and Christ to satisfy the deepest longing of your heart. The Bible says, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*” (Acts 16:31) And, that word *believe* means trust Christ; commit your life to Him. He died for your sins. Commit your life to Him, and you’ll be saved.

Lord God, I pray in the name of Jesus for these who need to be saved—that today, O God, today, they will say “yes” to Christ and be saved. For I pray in His wonderful name. Amen.

The Anatomy of a Sin

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: June 18, 1978

Main Scripture Text: James 1:13–15

*“Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin:
and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”*

JAMES 1:15

Outline

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- I. A Definite Possibility
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Conclusion

- A. Jesus Satisfies
- B. Jesus Strengthens

Introduction

Turn please to the book of James. You will remember that we’re preaching through the book of James—a very practical book—we call it religion in shoe leather, that is the book of James, very practical religion. Hmm, or religion in street clothes.

And, today we want to talk about “The Anatomy of a Sin,” or “Look for the Hook.” And, I want to read, please, James chapter 1, beginning in verse 13. That’s where we left off with our preaching last. Verse 13: *“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:”—*with evil, that’s implied, but certainly there—*“But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death”* (James 1:13–15).

Now, you will remember that the book of James uses the word *temptation* in two senses, with two meanings. Some temptations are tests. They’re trials, they’re not an inducement to do evil, but simply the tests, and the trials, and the hardships of life that come to us. These are sent by God in order to make a stand, but there are other temptations that are inducements to do evil—solicitation to sin—which is sent by Satan

to make us stumble, not to make us stand. They're not sent to strengthen us, but to weaken us and to destroy us. And, it is that kind of a temptation that we're dealing with this morning. The temptation to sin, the inducement to evil.

And, you'd better listen because the devil has already made plans to sabotage your life. The devil has already dug his pit that he wants you to fall in today. And, you're going to be bombarded the rest of your life with unbelievable temptations in every area, and it is so important that you learn not to succumb, not to be taken by the devil. Three things I want us to notice this morning, point number one: a definite possibility. Point number two: a divine impossibility. And, point number three: a direct responsibility.

I. A Definite Possibility

All right, are you ready? First of all, let's look at the definite possibility. Verse 13: "*Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God...*" (James 1:13)—just underscore the phrase "when he is tempted." It doesn't say *if* he is tempted. It says *when* he is tempted.

Dear friend, you're going to be tempted. You say, "Not me, I'm a Christian." Jesus was tempted in all points like as you are. And, you're not immune to temptation because you're a Christian. To the contrary, the temptations will increase, they will not diminish. Did you know that? Many people don't know that. Many people think that if you are a Christian, and especially if you're a good Christian, you're not going to have any temptations. Jesus had temptations and so will you.

Sometimes people say, "Oh, I wish I didn't have to work in an ol' office. I wish I could be a preacher. I just wish that I could be a minister of the gospel so I wouldn't know any temptations. Don't you know that the devil aims his biggest guns at God's preachers? Don't you know that? Of course he does. So would you if you were the devil.

All of us suffer temptation. The minute you become a friend of God you become an enemy of Satan. And, when God opens the windows of Heaven to bless us, the devil opens the doors of Hell to blast us. That's something that we need to learn. I tell these new Christians, when they come down here and give their heart to Jesus Christ, "If you've never met the devil, it's because you and the devil have been going in the same direction. You turn around; you'll meet him head on, if you're a Christian." Can you say amen to that? Yeah, you know what I'm talking about.

There was one man who was—he worked for this mean cruel boss. His mean cruel boss wasn't a Christian. This man was. He'd recently been found, but he'd recently been found by the Lord, or had found Christ, and he was somewhat unlettered, but he loved the Lord fervently. But, he was always telling his boss that the devil was dogging his footsteps and that he was having difficulty with temptation. One day they were talking about it while they were out duck hunting and the boss said to him, "Sam," he

said, “you’re a strange preacher. You claim to be a Christian and yet you’re always talking about wrestling with temptation, the devil always being after you.” He said, “I’m not even a Christian; I make no pretense of being a Christian. The devil never bothers me, how do you explain that?” He said, “Well, Boss, suppose we shoot two ducks. One of them falls dead and the other is still flopping in the water. Which one are we going to go after first?” “Well,” he said, “the one that’s still flopping.” He said, “That’s right boss. The devil knows you are a dead duck.” And that’s true. The devil doesn’t have to worry about some of you. He’s already—you’re dead—and at least if the devil’s after you it’s a sign of life. It’s a sign of life.

And, and there are going to be temptations. All people everywhere meet temptations. Whether you’re saved or whether you’re lost, but if you’re a child of God the strength of the temptation may increase, but the strength to overcome the temptation will increase also, and it makes it very glorious. But, don’t get proud. Don’t think that you come to the place where no longer you’re going to be tempted. That’s absolutely ridiculous. The Bible says, “...*let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall*” (1 Corinthians 10:12). And, the proud man tempts the devil to tempt him. May I say that again? The proud man tempts the devil to tempt him. And, so there is a definite possibility when he is tempted.

II. A Divine Impossibility

Now, the second thing I want you to notice is a divine impossibility. Verse 13: “*Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:*” (James 1:13) with evil. Now the word “with evil” is supplied, but that of course is inferred. God does not tempt us with evil, because God cannot be tempted with evil. It is absolutely impossible to be—for God to do any tempting.

You see, man by nature wants to blame his sin on God. You didn’t know that did you? But, a lot of what we call the *alibiing* and the excuses for sin are really just blaming our sin on God. Now, most people don’t just come out and say, “God made me sin.” No, they’re more clever than that. They have sort of a disguised way of saying that, “God tempted me.”

Do you remember in the Garden of Eden? Well, of course you don’t remember, you weren’t there, not most of you. But, when Adam sinned and God came walking in the midst of the Garden—and God remonstrated with Adam about his sin. Do you remember Adam’s little neat alibi? Adam said, “The woman thou gavest me. She gave me to eat and I did sin.” (Genesis 3:12) Now, really God, it wasn’t my fault. It was either her fault, or your fault. “The woman thou gavest me.” Now, that sounded pretty good. It really is not my fault. I’m not really guilty God. You did it to me, you placed me in this

situation.

Someone said that God blamed Adam. Adam blamed Eve. Eve blamed the serpent and the serpent didn't have a leg to stand on. Well, let me tell you something, friend, Adam was the one who didn't have a leg to stand on. Adam wanted to blame God. He just wanted to make it look like, well, it's just circumstances, it's just my environment.

Now, James is just going to pull the rug out from underneath you if you're trying to blame God. He says, "Now, there are two things that are impossible. Number one: it's impossible for God to be tempted with evil." You can't tempt God with evil. The devil can't dangle any bait in front of God that God is going to go after. Why? Because God has it all. There's nothing God needs, there's nothing God wants. He is sufficient in Himself and God has no itch the devil can scratch, and God is completely whole.

But, not only is God completely whole, God is completely holy. He is the complete other of sin. He is the antithesis of sin. It is absolutely impossible that God could be tempted. Someone says, "Well, now wait a minute, wasn't Jesus tempted, and wasn't Jesus God?" Yes, Jesus was tempted, and Jesus was God, but Jesus was more than God. Jesus was also man. Jesus shared our humanity, and in his humanity Jesus was tempted, but in his deity, Jesus was without sin. Praise His holy name.

But, God in His essence, in His nature, in His divine nature as God, God cannot be tempted with evil. And, also God cannot tempt with evil. There's something about sin that makes a person want to share it. Have you ever noticed how those who drink will try to get others to drink? Those who smoke try to get others to smoke. Those who commit immorality, they try to get others to do it. That is why Satan tried to induce Eve to sin, because he was a sinner. He has a product that he wants to export. Well, the product that God exports is godliness, and God does not tempt people to sin. And, so no one can say, "God tempted me."

You see, if you could say God tempted you, then you would have a perfect alibi—a perfect alibi—because you can fight God. I mean, everything God does, He does well. And, so if God places you in a situation that is beyond your control—whatsoever—then you are able to blame God.

Now, we're still doing this today. We don't say, "The woman thou gavest me." Here's what we say today, "The ghetto I was raised in," or, "The glands that I inherited," you see? We somehow want to still blame God. You know, "The parents that raised me." "My mama warped my psyche because she wouldn't let me push my mush off the high-chair." And, "Something happened to me," and that's the psychology today. "That man is not evil, he's just ill, man is not sinful, he's just sick." "It's not really his fault. It's something that just happened to him."

And, man is still saying to God, "God the woman thou gavest me," the background thou gavest me, the parents thou gavest me, the body thou gavest me, the environment

thou gavest me, and God won't buy it friend. God's not buying it. There's one thing that God will never accept for sin and that is an alibi. "...God tempteth no man with evil, neither can he be tempted with evil." (James 1:13) But, oh what good alibiers we are. You ask a man, "Say, why do you drink?" He says, "Why do I drink? Man, I drink because my wife nags me all the time. It's the only escape. Nag, nag, nag, nag, nag, that's why I drink." Say to her, "Why do you nag him all the time?" "Nag him, why wouldn't I? Drink, drink, drink, drink, drink. That's all he ever does, drink." Everybody can give you a reason for why they do everything, rather than say, "It's me, it's me, it's me. O God, standing in the need of prayer." There is a definite possibility that you're going to be tempted. There is a divine impossibility that God can be tempted with evil or that God will tempt you with evil. You cannot be tempted. God cannot be tempted with evil.

III. A Direct Responsibility

Now, the third thing, and the most important thing that I want us to say this morning, is the direct responsibility therefore. Here James, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, puts the responsibility for sin right directly where it belongs. Look, if you will, in verse 14: *"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren"* (James 1:14–16).

Somewhere I hear a little baby crying, and if that mama doesn't know it we have a nursery that'd be happy to take care of that precious baby. Sometimes people don't know that we do have a nursery.

All right, now look, I want you to notice this direct responsibility. I want you to notice that sin is an inside job. Do you have that? Sin is an inside job. It's not something that happens from without. It is something that happens primarily—primarily—within. Sin is an inside job. Here James doesn't even say that the devil made you do it. You can't say, "The devil made me do it." You're going to have to say, "I did it all by myself with just a little help from my friends."

Now, let me give you the illustration. James illustrates it by an immoral woman seducing a man, or by an immoral man seducing a woman. Now, of course, if he or she is seduced, it's a sign that both are immoral. It's a thin pancake that doesn't have two sides, but I want you to notice that is the figure of speech that he's talking about.

Now, he's not just merely talking about sexual sin. He's not merely talking about the sin of adultery, and fornication and immorality. But, he is using that kind of a sin as an illustration of all kinds of sin. There's a certain seductiveness to sin. And, so I want you to notice what James says about the anatomy of a sin, and you'll understand why I called it, "Look for the Hook."

Now, he says in verse 13: *“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed”* (James 1:13–14).

Now, this word “drawn away” is a word that is a fisherman’s word. That’s literally what the word means, in the original language. It is a term that would describe a fisherman who catches a fish by using a special bait or a lure. And, here’s the fisherman, he knows that Mr. Bass is out there somewhere, and he’s trying to out think Mr. Bass, and so he says, “I just believe Mr. Bass is hungry for this particular fly.” And, he takes it off his hat and puts it on there. Or, Mr. Bass is hungry for this particular worm, or Mr. Bass would like this particular spinner.

Now, he’s trying to out think Mr. Bass. And, then that fisherman takes that rod, and that reel, and he throws it out there just right. Well, Mr. Bass is up under that log, and he knows there’s a lily pad there, and it lands in the water, makes a little ripple, and then Mr. Fisherman waits for a moment and he twitches it once. Reels it a little, and lets it sit there, then he twitches it again. And, ol’ Mr. Bass is watching it, and watching it and there’s something in Mr. Bass that says, “I want that.” And, so suddenly Mr. Bass can stand it no longer, and he just explores, and gobbles it up and he finds out it’s got a hook in it and the fight is on.

Now, that’s the word that James is using. Every man is drawn away of his own lust. First of all, it’s like a courtship. Do you know how some of these woman get a man? Just like a fisherman gets a fish. Do you know why they call them hookers? Boy, I’ll tell you—thank you sir for that testimonial. You think about it, think about it. What do they call a prostitute? A hooker, a hooker. Uh huh, see, look for the hook. Forget the bait, look for the hook. There’s a hook there. The devil always has a hook. Oh, the bait looks good.

Now, some of you, you say, “Well, that’s—I’m not tempted that way.” Well, the devil knows what kind of bait to get you with. Remember, James is only using an illustration. You see, he threw out three separate baits to Jesus. First of all, turn these stones to bread. He baited his hook with bread. Jesus said, “I’m not going to take that bait.” And, then he said, “Cast yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple.” (Luke 4:9) and he baited the bread with pride, and Jesus wouldn’t go for that bait. And, then he took the bait of materialism and threw it out. You see, the devil was fishing, fishing, fishing. But, Jesus refused to take the bait. He refused, but the devil is a fisherman.

A. **The Courtship**

And, so the first thing I want you to see is the courtship, the courtship. There’s—the devil comes along, and he sort of courts you, he sort of tantalizes you with a sin. He dangles it in from of you. It may be lust, it may be pride, it may be envy, it may be

dishonesty, it may be revenge, it may be any one of a myriad number of sins. That's the courtship.

B. The Consent

Then secondly, there is the consent, the consent. The *courtship* is the word *drawn away*, but the *consent* is the word *enticed*. It literally means trapped, trapped, trapped. You see, there's no sin yet when the bait is dangled, there's no sin. It's not a sin for Satan to cast a lure out in front of you. But, while you can't keep the birds from flying over your head, you can keep them from making a nest in your hair. And, while you can't keep the devil from casting temptations in front of you, there comes a time when you consent to that temptation, and then when you do the hook is set. When you say, "I will." You see, an unholy marriage takes place. Down the aisle comes a desire, an unholy desire and coming from the other side comes the will and the Satan and the devil presides over that ceremony. When the will and the lust agree, when the will says I do to the lust, then a marriage, an unholy marriage takes place.

C. The Conception

First of all there's the courtship. Then there is the consent. Then there is the "I do," and when that happens, the hook is set and the battle is on. The next step is the conception because out of this marriage, there comes a child. I want you to look at it—look at it. Every man is tempted, when he's drawn away—that's the courtship—of his own lust and entice—that's the consent—and when lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin—that is the conception.

Now, he's talking about an unholy marriage here that produces an unholy child. And, the child of lust, and the will is sin, sin. And, "lust when it hath conceived bringeth forth sin" (James 1:15).

Now, at first it doesn't seem bad at all, no siree. I mean, after all when a baby is born, that's pretty happy time, most of the time. And, most people are pretty proud of their sin. They say, "Oh, what a beautiful baby. This is wonderful." And, they have a good time. Do you know the mistake that some preachers make? They try to tell young people that there's no fun in sin. That's ridiculous. Or, they try to say there's no pleasure in sin. That's ridiculous. Man, there are folks out there living in sin having the time of their life. Don't you know that?

And, sometimes well-meaning preachers go to a high school auditorium and tell the kids, "Now kids you can't go out here and get drunk, and have any fun. And, you can't run around and commit fornication, and have any fun. Man, come down to the church, that's where the fun is." That makes me sick to hear that kind of stuff. Man, the kids are too smart. They're having the time of their lives. They're having barrels full of fun. There is pleasure in sin. The Bible speaks of the pleasures of sin. And, when the lust and the

will consent, and there's a conception and a baby is born—and that sin is fun. They say, "Wow, this is great, what a beautiful baby." The pleasures of sin. But, the Bible says, "The pleasures of sin are but for season." (Hebrews 11:25). See, don't forget that: but for season.

You see, the devil is too smart to go fishing without any bait on his hook. *A man was walking down the road one time and he had a basket on his arm. And, in that basket he had some pods of beans, and he was dropping them out on the ground, and there was a herd of swine following along gobbling up those beans. And, someone said, "Mister, that's a strange way to feed your pigs." "Oh," he said, "I'm not feeding them. This is the way I take them to the slaughterhouse."* Amen.

You see, the devil has a basket on his arm, and in it are the pleasures of sin. There first all is the courtship. He just dangles it in front of you. Then, after the courtship there's the consent, when the will says I do. And, after the consent, there is the conception, an unholy union of the will and the lust, and a child is born. And, the name of that child is sin. Listen to it. And, lust when it hath conceived bringeth forth—or giveth birth to, that's what it means—sin.

D. **The Completion**

Oh, but it's not finished yet. I want you to see, not only the courtship, and the consent and the conception. I want you to see the completion—the completion. You see, that's where we fail to understand. Look at the completion, if you will, here in this verse of scripture. And, it says and, "*when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death*" (James 1:15). The completion. You see, you need to see the finished product of the devil's army.

The reason that some people don't fear sin is they don't look far enough ahead. They don't see sin when it is finished. Now, we Christians—who sometimes are not up on our sanctification—we excuse ourselves by saying to someone, "Don't be too hard on me, the devil's not finished with me yet." Well, that's pretty good, excuse me, the Lord's not finished with me yet." Don't be too hard on me, the Lord's not finished with me yet."

Well, I want to say to you, if you are not a Christian, and you're feeling that you're doing pretty good right now, don't be too easy on you, the devil's not finished with you yet. The devil, you see, sin when it is finished. There are a lot of people who are being pretty easy on themselves because they have not seen the finished product, the finished product of the devil's art. The child of lust is sin, and the child of sin is death. That's the devil's LSD—lust, sin, death—there is the progression. Lust, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. That's the completion of the whole thing.

You see, you need to see the total product. Dr. Robert G. Lee used to say, “You can eat the devil’s corn if you want to, but he’ll choke you on the cob.” Amen. You see, “The bread of deceit is sweet, but afterward, a man’s mouth shall be filled with gravel.” (Proverbs 20:17)

Let’s just look at some scriptures. We’re talking about the finished product of the devil’s art. Turn to Proverbs chapter 23 for a moment. If we have enough time—you’ve been listening real fast—all right, Proverbs chapter 23 and look in verse 32, or let’s begin in verse 31: “*Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright*” (Proverbs 23:31). Did you know there are few things on earth more beautiful than a glass of wine—ruby red, sparkling—the bubbly they call it, right? “It moveth itself aright.”

Say, I want to ask you a question. Have you ever noticed that the most tantalizing and beautiful advertisements are generally the liquor and cigarette advertisements? Have you ever noticed that? I mean, have you ever seen that Four Roses advertisement, and those roses frozen there in that cake of ice or something? God makes the beautiful rose and they use that to advertise booze with. Have you ever seen that? Or, the cigarette ads where they show you a beautiful mountain scene, and the clear running creek or, you know, all of this. They make it look so beautiful, and it’s just so tantalizing. Man, you just almost want to lick your chops when you see it. And, the little beads of frost on the outside the glass. And oh, they spent thousands and thousands of dollars making their bait, ’cause you are the poor fish they want. And, oh, I’m telling you, they know the bait. Listen, these fellows are in the tackle business, and they know how just to do it.

But, you see, you need to look for the hook. I want you to see now, continue to read here in The Word of God, here in verse 32, look at what he says—in verse 31, it’s described so beautifully here. Proverbs 23, verse 32: “*At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder*” (Proverbs 23:32). Not at the beginning, at the last—sin when it is finished.

When I was down in Florida, I had an artist to paint for me a sign that I put on our parking lot. And, he showed a picture of a man in an alley with a beer bottle in his hand by a garbage can, with a big ol’ rat, about that long, running past. And, this man was passed out, holding that beer bottle in his hand, and underneath I put these words: “The finished product of the brewer’s art.” At that time there was a particular brand of beer that had for their byline: “The finest product of the brewer’s art.” I just changed it a little bit and said, “The finished product of the brewer’s art.” Well, one day I got a telephone call from Mr. Brewer himself and he said, “Mr. Rogers, I need to see you.” I said, “I’ll meet you in my office in five minutes.” And, I knew what he wanted to talk about, but I acted like I didn’t. I said, “What do you want to talk about?” “Well,” he said, “it’s that sign

of yours out there.” I said, “What about it?” He said, “I believe it discriminates on my product.” I said, “Mister, I want you to know that your product is brewed with tears, thickened with blood, and flavored with death. And, if I were you I’d get on my knees right now and ask God to have mercy on me.” Well, he wasn’t expecting that. I think he wanted an apology.

“Well,” he said, “if you want to talk that way about it,” he said, “I believe that discriminates against my product and is grounds for a lawsuit.” I said, “Wonderful, sue. I’d like to see this picture on the front page of the newspaper.” I said, “You know, you’ve got a lot of nerve. You’re constantly bombarding our young people, constantly. You’re painting the most beautiful scenes that the artist can imagine, and you’re coming by means of radio, by means of television, by means of newspaper, by means of billboards and everything else telling these kids to drink that stuff. And, you only show half the picture, and I put one measly sign on a parking lot of a church and you got your hackles up.” I said, “I’ll make a deal, you take your signs down, I’ll take my down.” Amen.

They don’t want to show the finished product. They don’t want to show the drunkard in the gutter, covered with his own vomit and flies. They don’t want to show the broken homes. They don’t want to show the wrecked automobiles. They don’t want to show the wills that have been snapped, and the marriages that have been broken. They don’t want to show that. They don’t want to show the serpents bite. All they want to show, all they want to show is the glass that sparkles aright, you see.

You better be wise friend, you better look for the hook. Sin when it is finished—the finished product of the devil’s art. Let me give you another illustration. Look please in Proverbs 5 for a moment. Here we’re going to talk a little bit about not only the sin of drinking, but the sin of immorality. Proverbs chapter 5, beginning in verse 3: *“For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil”* (Proverbs 5:3). Now, he’s talking about the immoral woman, the loose woman, the playgirl. And, oh, she’s so tantalizing. And, the devil’s worked hard on this bait. The lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb— honey lips. Her mouth is smoother than oil. Oh, brother, does she have a line. She knows all of the philosophies of why and how this is not wrong. Everybody does it, it’s all right. And, who could refuse that, if that’s as far as they look. But, I want you to see the finished product of the devil’s art here. I want you to go on and read the next verse, verse 4: *“But her end”—or the end of that way—“is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell”* (Proverbs 5:4–5). You’d better see the finished product, sin when it is finished, when it is finished. You must have been a beautiful baby, but baby look at you now. You see, this is in The Word of God, young people, so that you might learn. Lust when it hath conceived bringeth forth sin, and sin when it is finished.

Now, you know, I’ve got some self-righteous materialists who are listening to me

right now, and you wouldn't think of getting drunk, and you wouldn't think of committing immorality, and so you're feeling pretty good. Let me give you another verse. Jeremiah chapter 17, verse 11. We're talking about the finished product now. This talks about the sin of materialism: *"As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool"* (Jeremiah 17:11).

Now, you see, when a man gets riches and not by right. That is when he gets tainted money—'tain't his—but he gets it and he seems to be enjoying it, he looks fine. But, the Bible says, "look past it, look past it, go on down to the end. He's going to die in the midst of his days. He's going to leave it and at its end, he'll be a fool." Not now, but then. See, the finished product.

You say, "Well, I don't steal. I'm just a good businessman." Well, what you do sir—some of you—you're so shrewd that what you do is not unlawful, it's just immoral, immoral. You take advantage of people. Or, some of you don't even do that, but you're just workaholics. You know, sometimes we tell our young people, "Make all the money you can, just so you make it honestly." That's not good advice. That's hellish advice. Nobody has a right to make all the money he can, because if he makes all the money he can he'll be making money when he ought to be doing something else. He'll be making money when he ought to be praying. He'll be making money when he ought to be soul winning. He'll be making money when he ought to be in the house of God. He makes money his God when he makes all the money he can. There's nothing wrong with making money. It's "the Lord thy God that giveth the power to get wealth." (Deuteronomy 8:18) We talked about this last week, but I'm telling you sir, that if you are a materialist, you had better see the finished product, you'd better look for the hook. He will leave them "in the midst of his days and at his end, he'll be a fool."

You see, the Bible tells us this over and over again, in Proverbs chapter 14, verse 12: *"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death"* (Proverbs 14:12). "The end thereof, friend, don't look at a thing for what it is, look at it for where it is headed. There is a definite possibility, and that is you'll be tempted, even today. There is a divine impossibility that God could be doing the tempting. There is a direct responsibility, *"every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed"* and *"...lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death"* (James 1:14–15).

Conclusion

Now, what is the answer to it all? The answer of course is Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ and Him alone. Only through Jesus can you live as you ought to live. Why? You see, a man falls into temptation, a woman falls into temptation, because they're trying to satisfy

something within them. I want to tell you that God made you. God so made you that you can never be satisfied, unless you're satisfied with Jesus Christ. Are you listening?

A. Jesus Satisfies

God made a fish to swim in the sea. God made a bird to soar through the air. And, God made you to know Him, and to love Him, and to serve Him. God did something for you that He didn't do for any of the other creation. God put within you a spirit. God made you in His image, and you are restless, and you will be restless until you rest in the Lord Jesus Christ. Until you know Jesus Christ you'll be like a fish in a tree. You'll be like a bird in the sea. You'll be a misfit. You'll be like a round peg in a square hole. You will not find rest and satisfaction until you find it in Jesus.

And, the devil goes along, and the devil sees that desire that you have. A legitimate, God-given desire, and he tries to get you to satisfy a legitimate desire in an illegitimate way, and that my friend is sin. But, in and through Jesus your desires can be satisfied the right way. You see, that's the way to overcome temptation, is to receive Christ and to love Christ.

*Friends all around me are trying to find,
What the heart yearns for by sin undermined;
I have the secret, I know where 'tis found.
Only true pleasures In Jesus abound.
Jesus is all this world needs today.
Blindly they strive, for sin darkens their way.
Oh to pull back the grim curtains of night,
One look at Jesus, and all will be light. (Harry D. Loes)*

B. Jesus Strengthens

But, not only is Jesus the answer to temptation because He satisfies, but Jesus is the answer to temptation because He strengthens. You see, Christ who comes in you gives you power to overcome the devil. And, the Holy Spirit says, "That's just a lure, look for the hook." The Holy Spirit says, "You don't need that." The Holy Spirit says, "I'll give you strength."

You see, when you get saved, God makes you a new man. St. Augustine, one of the great Christians of yesteryear, was as a young man a profligate. He lived in immorality and sin. He wasted his time with harlots, strumpets, wicked, lascivious, loose woman. But, then Jesus Christ called him, and saved him, and he was born again. Still a young man, still feeling the fires and passion of youth, but he was saved now. Jesus Christ was in his heart.

St. Augustine, 'course they didn't call him St. Augustine then, they just called him Augustine, was walking down the street after he'd been saved, and one of his old

girlfriends—one of these hookers, one of these prostitutes—saw him, and she called to him. He pretended he didn't see her. He just turned his head and walked the other way, looking away you know. And, he crossed over across the street so he wouldn't have to meet her. And, she saw him, and she called again, and she said, "Augustine, it is I." And, he said, "Yes, but it is no longer I," and he kept on going. Amen.

You see, that's what Jesus does for you. It is no longer "I, but Christ that liveth in me." (Galatians 2:20) And, then dear friend, let me say that Jesus not only is He the source of satisfaction, and not only is He the source of strength, but Jesus, O, Jesus, will bring you one day to be with Him in Heaven.

I want you to know Jesus. The only way to live is the Christian way. The only life to live is the Christian life. I want you to be saved, and you can be saved today. The Bible says, "...*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...*" (Acts 16:31). That doesn't mean just to believe there is a Jesus. The devil believes that.

But, when the Bible says, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,*" the Bible uses a word which means *trust*. Are you willing to trust Jesus today? Are you willing to say in your heart, like a little child, "O, Lord Jesus, I need to be saved, I want to be saved and right now, with all of my heart. I trust you, and you alone to save me." Pray a prayer like that, and mean it, and I'll guarantee you on the Authority of this book that Jesus Christ will save you. For the Bible says, "*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved*" (Romans 10:13).

And, the same God that saved some of those this morning in the eight o'clock service, is the God who will save you right now if you call upon Him. I promise. But, what is more important, He promises, He will save you. He died in agony and blood to save you. And, when He saves you, He will satisfy you, and when He satisfies you, He will strengthen you, and when He strengthens you, He will secure you. It's all through Jesus, it's all through Jesus.

Living in the Sunshine

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: July 19, 1992

Main Scripture Text: James 1:17

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”

JAMES 1:17

Outline

Introduction

I. Light Is Pure

II. Light Is Powerful

III. Light is Persistent

IV. Light Is Pleasant

V. Light Is Productive

Conclusion

Introduction

The title of the message is "Living in the Sunshine." From shades of night, to flames of light, He—our dear Lord—lifted me. Find the book of James, please, chapter one. In just a moment we are going to begin reading in verse seventeen. Now I've told you before that the devil wants you to think negatively about God. The devil wants you to blame God on the troubles and the heartaches and the disappointments you are having.

Joyce and I, some years ago had a little baby boy that died—one of those unexplainable crib deaths. And our hearts ached, we went through sorrow and pain but the Lord Jesus was there, so near and so real. Joyce and I learned to depend on Him so much and grew so much in that experience. Heartache and pain indeed it was. We had never known such deep sorrow. But the Lord was so real to us. And that was in, J. W., Fort Pierce where you and I know so much about, where we've been so much. And, I was back in the hospital in the Fort Pierce Hospital a few days after we had buried our little son Phillip. And I had been visiting a man who was not a Christian. And I had been witnessing to him, trying to lead him to Jesus Christ. And he somehow had learned that our son had died. And when he saw me walk in that room, he said, "What are you doing here?" I said, well, I came to see you; to visit you. He said, "What? Are you still serving God, after what He did to you?" Now, you think about that. Are you still after what He did to you? I said, "Oh, my friend, I want you to listen to me, and I want you to get it

down big and plain and straight, that the author of all suffering and sorrow and pain and death is Satan, not God. God is good. God is good. And the suffering we have in this world is because we live in a world that has been cursed with sin, and if you think that I'm going to line up against God in favor of the devil, and line up with the one who has ultimately wounded me, your so wrong."

Now look at our verse of Scripture here—James chapter one, verse seventeen: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the father of lights in whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of His own will begat He us, with a word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creature." Understand this: Every good gift, every perfect gift comes down from above. There is no good but what it comes from God, and only good comes from God. There is no good but what it comes from God. And only good comes from God. "Every good gift, every perfect gift, cometh down from above, from the father of lights, in whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning."

What does He mean by the Father of Lights? He is comparing God Almighty to the sun that shines in the sky. You know, the Bible says that God put the sun in the sky and the moon their as signs, that is as ordinances. There is a lesson there; there is a lesson in all of nature. And God gives us so many illustrations of His person and of His grace. Wasn't it Elizabeth Barrett Browning who said that, "Earth is crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God. But only he who sees takes off his shoes. The rest surround it and pluck blackberries." You know, if you would just see that God is manifest in nature. God shows Himself as the Father of Lights, and, when you see the sun shining in the sky today, there are some lessons I want you to learn about our great God. For the Apostle John has also said in 1 John chapter one and verse five "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all."

So I want you to think about the Father of Lights today. I want you to think about this good God today. I want you to think about this God from whom all good comes and from whom nothing but got good comes—The Father of Lights. And understanding that, just seeing who God is, then I want you to learn to live in the sunshine.

I. Light Is Pure

Now, I've had a good time this week just thinking about light. I've sat at my desk and studied about light. As a matter of fact, I've done a little bit of a study now on the Theory of Relativity. Einstein and I understand all about that. I'll explain it to you know, in just a few moments. But, I, we we're going to learn some wonderful things about light. The very first thing I want you to see about God's light is, that it is pure light. Pure light. Now get this in your heart and in your mind. Did you know that that their is nothing known in the universe as pure as light? Nothing as pure as light. You see, it is absolutely

impossible for light to be defiled. You can pass light through any medium, it will not pick up the properties of the medium through which it passes. It's just as pure as when it comes out the other side as it was when it went in. You cannot stain light. You can put some filth on the ground, and the light will shine upon that filth, but the light will not be filth. You can put some disease germs there, and the light may shine upon those disease germs but the light cannot catch that disease. It is absolutely impossible to soil light.

Now, when the snow falls on the ground, after awhile the snow gets muddy and dingy. It may be crystal white, but after a while, it's defiled. Water may bubble up from a pure stream, but after it runs through the river course it picks up the minerals and dirt and the slime that's in the river course. You see, everything else can be defiled, but light can never ever be defiled.

What a wonderful picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible speaks of Jesus and which was the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. First John one, verse nine: "He is the true Light." And therefore we see that Jesus Christ, while He could touch sinners, sin could never touch Jesus. Jesus was here on this earth. Jesus walked the shores of Galilee. Jesus lived among us, but He could point to anyone and say "Who of you can convince Me of sin?" Thank God for this pure light. Light may reveal sin, light may expose sin, but light can never be contaminated by sin. And may I say dear friend, it is because of the purity of our God that we worship Him today and sing holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty. Light is pure; therefore, it's a symbol of light. This light is pure light, but wait a minute.

II. Light Is Powerful

Secondly, this light is powerful—light. Have you ever thought of the power of light? Oh, my dear friend, in John chapter one and verse five, the Bible spoke of the Lord Jesus Christ as being light. And then the Bible says, "And the Light shined in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not."

Now what does that mean? It doesn't mean that the darkness did not understand it. What that really means is that the darkness has no defense against light. What is the enemy of light? Darkness. What is the enemy of darkness? Light. Now in a battle between light and darkness, who always wins? Who, what? Light. Light always wins. You can never go into a light room and turn on the dark. There's no switch where you can turn on the dark. You can always go into a dark room and turn on the light. You see, darkness always has to flee in the presence of light. Light is absolutely, totally omnipotent against darkness. By the way, if you want to get darkness out of your life or you want to get darkness spiritually, if you want to get darkness out of a room physically, how are you going to get the darkness out? You going to shovel it out? You

going to curse it out? You going to take a broomstick and beat it out? No! Just turn on the light. And the darkness cannot stay. You see there is such power in light.

But think about the light that we are talking about now. We're talking about the light of the sun. The light of the sun in the physical world is only an illustration of the light that we call Almighty God, and how powerful that light is. No one would ever think of going to the sun, you wouldn't last. Man may talk about going to the moon, and the moon only reflects the light of the sun. And on the brightest moonlit night, the light of the moon is only one 800,000th as bright as a sun shiny day—one 800,000th as bright as a sunshiny day. Man may go to the moon where there is reflected light, but who would ever think of going to the sun? Of course, you couldn't do it. You can't even look at the sun at high noon, without putting out your eyes.

You see, the Bible speaks of our great God in 1 Timothy chapter six and verse sixteen, "Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto." Oh dear friend, you couldn't even see God and live. Think of the powerful energy in the sun. In my studies this week, you know what I found out? That in one second—one second, that much time—the sun puts out as much energy as the earth has consumed in all the history of mankind. One second. That's how much energy the sun is putting out. Four million tons of hydrogen are consumed every second in nuclear power. Incredible, incredible energy is coming from that sun. And that speaks of the power of God, "The Father of Lights, in whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning." And yet, you know, as Newton said, "The mighty sun, that holds the planets on orbit, ripens a little bunch of grapes like it had nothing else to do." And the great God who runs this universe knows, my dear friend, of the number of hairs on your head. And the sun that shines on you today tells me of the love of God. And God is concerned about the smallest matters in your life. Oh, the power of light. Darkness cannot stand against it. What incredible power in our great God!

III. Light is Persistent

Now here's the third thing I want you to think about. Not only the purity of light—it cannot be defiled. And it speaks my dear friend of the holiness of our God. The power of light speaks of the omnipotence of God. And then, my dear friend, James says, "This light this light has no variableness. It has no shadow of turning." Now, what does that mean? I read quite a bit about that. Now what it means is that this sun never sets. It's always high noon with God. Now if I stand perfectly straight, and the sun is right over my head, there is no shadow. But if the sun is rising, or the sun is setting, then there will be a shadow. But the Bible says that with God, there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning. What He means is with our great God, it's always high noon. It's always high noon. God's love never stops shining.

We have daylight saving time today. You know, daylight savings time was invented by an old Indian chief. He cut off the bottom part of his blanket and sewed it to the top of his blanket to make his blanket longer, Tommy. And that's what we do with daylight savings time. You know we try and we think, you you're not going to change dear friend, the way God runs the universe. But with God, with God, this sun is always at its zenith; it is always high noon. Now look at it. "Every good gift, every perfect gift, comes down from above, from the Father of lights, in whom is no variableness." Now, what does that mean? It means there is no change.

Now, let's talk a little bit about Einstein's Law of Relativity. May I tell you, first of all, that Einstein didn't come up with it; he could have learned from James—the Theory of Relativity. It is right here. You see, Einstein said that the reason that he could construct the Theory of Relativity, he literally said this is because there is one thing and one thing alone in the universe that is unchanging and unchanging.

Do you know what that is? Light—the speed of light. Everything is based on that. The speed of light is constant in the physical, material universe. And Einstein, because of that, made a theory. $E = mc^2$ —energy—equals m —mass— c —which is the velocity of light—squared. Simple, isn't it? Well, a small amount of mass is able to produce a tremendous amount of energy, according to this formula. Any given object equals its mass times the speed of light squared.

Now, obviously, I don't understand any of that—none of it, not any, except for one thing: that it is all based on one principal—that light travels at 186,000 miles per second. And it never, never, never, never, never, varies. Now that's fast—186,000 miles a second. That's seven times around the world in one second. Just gone around the world seven times. That's how fast light travels. But traveling at that speed, it never varies. It is constant.

Now this is why we call this the Law of Relativity, because everything else is relative. For example, if I'm on a train traveling along, and you're standing by the tracks and you have a stopwatch, and the train is traveling at 100 miles an hour, you can put your stopwatch on that train, and say, well, the pastor went by at 100 miles an hour. Now, if you get on a train on the other track, and you're traveling 100 miles west, and I'm traveling 100 miles east, when we pass, relatively, we are moving at 200 miles an hour. You, 100 miles this way, and I, 100 miles this way, so, relatively, it is like one of us is traveling at 200 miles an hour. You get the idea?

That's the relative speed. But now, if our trains are on parallel tracks, and I'm traveling at 100 miles an hour, and you are traveling 106 miles an hour, and I look out the window at you, and you go by me at 6 miles an hour, relatively, you're traveling at 6 miles an hour faster than I am. You see, it's all relative—it's all relative. But now, wait a minute. I'm going to tell you what I learned this week. You're going to see just how

smart your pastor is, now. I'm going to tell you what I learned this week.

If you were somehow to hijack a light beam—you're traveling, now; you've just hijacked a light beam, and you're traveling 186,000 miles a second. There you go. Went by. All right, speed of light, that's how fast you're going. Now let's suppose I'm traveling on a light beam this way, and Brother Sorell, he hijacks a light beam, and he's going this way, and we pass each other. There we go, traveling at the speed of light. Now, am I relatively traveling twice 186,000 miles per second? No. You put the stopwatch on either of one of us, it is still 186,000 miles per second. There's no relativity there. The speed of light is not relative; it's constant.

Now what happened is that the speed doesn't change; time changes—time changes. When you reach the speed of light, time stands still. That's all based on this—you knew this, Rick—that it's based on this. And the closer you get to the speed of light, the more time slows down. And so, therefore, light is not relative at all. It's a fixed thing.

And so, you see that the Bible says that God dwells in light that no man can approach unto. But, one day, we're going to approach unto it, because Jesus is the Light of the World, and we're going to be made exactly like Him. And, when we're made exactly like Him, we're in eternity—for us, there is no more time. Time stands still. We're just like Him. But in hell, those in outer darkness, for them, time never ends. For us, time stands still. We are like our Lord; we come into the presence of Almighty God; we are made like Him. Now, Einstein said, "Listen. I was able to figure out the energy that's in an atom, by one principle. There is something totally, absolutely changeless in this physical material universe; and it is the speed of light."

James says, "With God, the Father of lights, there is no variableness." No change—no change. That's the reason, Tommy, I was so glad you sang this morning, "Great is Thy Faithfulness; O God my Father, there is no shadow of turning with thee. Thou changest not; Thy compassions they fail not. As thou hast been, forever wilt be." You see, the Bible says, in Malachi chapter three, verse six, "For I am the Lord; I change not." The Bible says, in Hebrews chapter thirteen and verse eight, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever." God is the Father of lights, in whom there is no variableness. There is no shadow of turning.

What have I said about light? Light is pure—it's impossible to defile. Light is powerful—darkness can never stand before it. Light is persistent—it never changes, never changes—in the spiritual realm as well as in the physical realm. Thank God, for our God, who says, I change not; therefore, you sons of Jacob, are not condemned."

IV. Light Is Pleasant

Now, I want to say something else about light. It's also pleasant. Oh, listen. Look at our scripture here. Where the Bible says here, every good gift and perfect gift is from above,

which cometh down from the Father of lights. My wife showed me a verse in the Scripture some time ago from Ecclesiastics eleven, verse seven. I'd never seen it until she pointed it out to me. I guess I'd seen it, I'd read it; but it never made an impact on me. And this is what it says: "Truly, the light is sweet, and it is a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun." Truly, the light is sweet. That's the reason I said, nothing but good comes from God, and all good comes from God. Every good gift, every perfect gift, cometh down from above.

Now, we thank God for any light; but artificial illumination can never match the sweetness of sunlight. Did you know there are seven colors in light—seven colors in the spectrum, all the way from infrared to ultraviolet? There are seven colors. But if you put them all together, it's pure white—it's pure white. But if you look at light through a prism, then you can see all of those colors that are there. Did you know that without light there is no color? The color in that American flag is really not in the American flag; the color in the American flag is in the light that shines on it. The color in this bouquet is not in this bouquet; the color is in the light that shines in the bouquet. Take away the light, and everything is colorless. Everything is black. All of the color is in the light. It is God who beautifies everything. That's the reason the Bible says, in thy light we shall see light. Oh, my dear friend, it is God who makes everything beautiful, in His time. It is God, the Father of light, who shines on us with the multi-colored, variegated splendors of His grace.

You can live in the twilight zone if you want to, dear friend; I'd rather walk in the sunlight. I'd rather let God show me the beauties of this world, and what He wants to impart. But remember, dear friend, there is no real beauty; there is no real understanding of what God has done in this universe, apart from light—apart from light. No color without light. By the way, everything is wrapped up in this—that God is light.

We saw that there are seven hues in the spectrum. Seven is the perfect number, isn't it? But look at what James has said here. Look: "Every good gift and every" what? "perfect gift"—every perfect gift—"cometh down from above, from the Father of lights, in whom there is no change—no variableness, nor shadow of turning."

V. Light Is Productive

I want to say something else about this light. Not only, my dear friend, is it pleasant light; it is productive light—productive light. Did you know that there can be no life, without light? There can be no life without light. If the sun would cease to shine, forget life here on this earth. You see, the Bible says, of the Lord Jesus—you might put this verse in your margin—John one verse four—speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of the world." In Him life, and that life is light.

When I was a little boy in the fourth grade, I was introduced to a term. I think it was

the biggest word I ever understood up to that time. It was the word photosynthesis—photosynthesis. Do you remember learning that word? And they told us about chlorophyll, and these other things. And they told us that photo meant light. Synthesis means to put together. And I learned that everything's put together with light, that the green things are put together; there's a processes of energy, of putting things together, of photosynthesis. That's where the green things come together—grown with light. Spiritually my dear friend, this world is put together by spiritual photosynthesis. Everything is just put together by light. When God wanted to turn this chaos into cosmos, He said let there be light. And there was light. The Bible, said the entrance of thy word gives life. You see, you don't have life without the Lord Jesus Christ; all you have is existence. And, by the way, dear friend, that existence would cease if the sun were to cease shining; your physical existence, of course, your spiritual existence, would go on and on in a place of outer darkness.

But see, this is what James is talking about: this light is productive. Continue to read. Look, if you will, here, in James one, verse eighteen: "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." What is the Word of truth? The Bible! The entrance of thy word giveth light, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures. You see, it is the light that causes productivity. God is light. God is light, and in Him is no variableness, nor shadow of turning. Every good gift, every perfect gift cometh down from above from the Father of light. Now, I don't mean that God is physical, material life. I'm saying that the physical, material life is created by God. It's created by God, among other things, to help us understand just who God is.

Now, I'm finished with that part of it. Now, just let me talk to you for a moment. Are you afraid of the light? We laugh at children being afraid of the dark. Far more ridiculous than a child being afraid of the dark is a grown man afraid of the light. And yet, there are those that are afraid of the light, and there are those who hate the light, and despise the light. Do you know why people die and go to hell? Well, it's not because Jesus did not die. Jesus died. He paid the sin debt. Why are people hell-bound? Well, let Jesus give you the answer.

Put this in your margin, John chapter three, beginning in verse eighteen. Here's what the master teacher, the Lord Jesus, said: "I am the Light of the world. I am the light of the world."---Here's what He said. "He that believeth on Him", he that believeth on Jesus "is not condemned." Friend, if you would trust Jesus, every sin, every stain, every blot, every blemish, I don't care what you've done, you'll be washed whiter than snow. There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. He that believeth on Him is not condemned, but He that believeth not is condemned already.

What do you have to do to be lost? Nothing—you're already lost. Why? Because you lie, steal, cheat, murder? No, that's not the primary reason—those sins have been paid

for. He that believeth not is condemned already because He hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And listen to what He says, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light. Because their deeds are evil."

A man says, well, it's not my fault I can't believe. Oh, yes, it is you're fault you can't believe. You see, my dear friend, anybody who wants to believe can believe. Anybody who wants God, God will give him the grace to believe. You're problem is not in your head. You don't have an intellectual problem; you have moral problems. Your problem is in your heart. And your wicked heart has put out your spiritual eye, and you're morally wicked and spiritually blind. Because the Bible says you hate the light, and you will not come to the light, that your deeds might be made manifest. The reason that some men can't find God is the same reason a thief can't find the policeman.

They don't want to find the policeman. He doesn't want to find a policeman. Listen to what he says: "Everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds might be made manifested. They are wrought in God."

Have you ever thought about the things that love darkness—owls, and toads, and spiders, and bats? When the sun is shining, and the birds begin to sing, and the creatures come out—clean animals. There are certain people who, by their very nature, love darkness. But you see, after they have denied the light, and despised the light, then, what do they do? They distort the light. I've been listening to the politicians lately.

There's a verse of Scripture that has come to my mind. And oh, it has burned itself into my heart. I want you to listen to it—Isaiah chapter five and verse twenty: "Woe unto them that call evil good. Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light and light for the darkness." This world not only despises the light, but this world, in its moral confusion would distort the light. And saith, the light—that's darkness; and saith, the darkness—that is light. I want you to listen to what the Lord Jesus said in Matthew chapter six, verse twenty-two: "The light of the body is the eye; therefore, if thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."

But now, listen to what He said: "But if thy eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness." Now, here's one of the most chilling verses in the Bible. "Therefore, if the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is thy darkness." When what you call light is darkness, when you say, I am walking in the light, and you're walking in stingy and midnight darkness, my dear friend, there is little hope for you, because you think you are in the light. If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is thy darkness." "Woe unto them that put good for evil, evil for good; light for dark, and dark for light."

Conclusion

Friend, I want to tell you that Jesus Christ is the Light of the World. And I want to tell you that every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights, in whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning. These people who love darkness so much, one day, their going to get more than they want.

In Jude, verse thirteen, hell is spoken of. Hell is spoken of as outer darkness. You know what heaven is described as? A city of light. Revelation, I read it last night. There's no need of the sun or the moon there; the Lord Jesus is the light of that city. Oh, for all eternity we'll live in that sunshine. And, my dear friend, if you die without Jesus Christ, you'll die and go to hell. Is that impolite to say? No, I'm saying that out of a heart of love. You'll die and go to hell, and you'll never see one glimmer, not even a flick of a candle.

Louis the 14th was a man so full of himself, so proud, he gave himself the name Louis the Great. He lived in regal splendor. When asked about politics, Louis the Great said, I am the state. He had his own funeral planned. When he died, he was laid out in a golden coffin—pure gold. He was put in a massive cathedral, and he gave orders that one candle would light the cathedral, placed right above his golden coffin. What an egotist! One candle. Bishop Masselen came to preach the funeral of Louis the 14th, Louis the Great. There in that massive cathedral that candle flickered over the coffin of Louis the Great. Bishop Masselen, went plitt, and put out the candle, and said, only God is great—only God is great.

One day, my dear friend, your candle will go out, and there will be nothing but darkness, unless you know the God who is a good God. You learn this about God—learn it big and plain and straight: No good comes to you except it comes from God, and only from God comes good.

Father of light, Father, I pray, I pray that you will bring the message home to our hearts. And I pray, God, that many in this building today will come to Jesus and be saved. In His dear name. Amen.

How to Handle Conflicts

By Adrian Rogers

Sermon Date: May 5, 1996

Main Scripture Text: James 1:19

Outline

Introduction

I. Tune In

II. Tone Down

III. Lighten Up

Conclusion

Introduction

Would you take your Bibles, and open your Bibles to James chapter one, and were going to begin reading in just a moment, in verse nineteen. Now, we've been talking about intimacy in marriage, and how to achieve it. And we've been saying that we have to work at it, because we're so different.

We've been talking about the differences in the sexes, and men and women are just wired differently. Physically, emotionally, psychologically, we're different. Then, not only are we different that way, but, as individuals, we're different. We have different temperaments, and often opposites attract. And then, on top of that, we come from different family backgrounds, and we bring different traditions and different thoughts, different habits to the marriage. We're very different.

Joyce and I are very different. Now, we're very much in love, but, folks, we are very different. I did not realize how different we were when we were children growing up together, and we had known each other since the fourth grade. But, as we got older, I began to discover those differences. Once upon a time, we were on a Ferris wheel, and we were out having a wonderful time, and we got on this huge Ferris wheel, and it stopped, and our car was right at the very top, and for some reason, the Ferris wheel stopped, and we were sitting up there with nothing to do. So I thought it would be a good idea to rock the car back and forth. I discovered that we are very different.

And I have been discovering those differences down through the years, but I have been enjoying the differences. But I want to say this, and I want to be very honest with you today, and honesty sometimes hurts. Joyce and I have sometimes had some very lively discussions. I mean, we have known what it is to debate with our mate, and it is common to get into these things, whether you're saved or whether you're lost, and

whether you're in the ministry or out of the ministry.

Now, the real problem is not whether or not we're going to get into conflicts, but the real question is, how do we settle them? Now, some folks don't do a very good job of settling their conflicts. I believe, rather than being married by the Justice of Peace they were married by the Secretary of War, and that war just goes on right on through the marriage. So I want to talk today about how to fight fair, how to handle conflicts, and, especially, how to deal with anger.

Look in verse nineteen: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." Another word for wrath is anger. "For the wrath of man worketh not, the righteousness of God." Now, in this passage, very brief, there are some of the most incredible, wonderful words for husbands and wives to resolve conflicts. But of course, not only husbands and wives, for anybody to resolve conflicts, if we'll learn to do these three things.

I. Tune In

Now, first of all, he tells us here to be quick to listen. Look, if you will, in this verse again, in verse nineteen: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear." Now, what He's saying is this: we need first of all to tune in.

Do you know why God gave us two ears and only one mouth? We ought to listen a whole lot more than we do. And we especially need to learn to what the other person is saying. Now, I have an occupational hazard, and that is that I am a preacher, and I like to talk. And, as a result, I'm not necessarily a good listener—but I am learning. Notice I said, I am learning, not that I have learned; I am learning to listen. And, I would say a word to all of us. Wives or husbands, learn to listen.

Now, let me tell me why you need to do what God's Word says here, to be swift to hear. Number one, when you do listen, you encourage your spouse to talk. Now, if he or she has the idea that you're not listening, they're not going to want to talk. And so, when you listen, you encourage them to talk.

Well, what good does that do? It helps you to understand. You cannot understand somebody that you're not listening to. And when you understand your mate, it follows, as night follows day, that understanding is going to bring you closer together. You're going to achieve intimacy. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to understand that. Now, the reason many of us don't listen is, number one, we're so defensive.

Our ego is there. We don't want to hear; we don't want anybody to tell us anything. Number two, we assume we already know what they're going to say, and we finish their sentence for them before they ever get to the end to finish it. And number three, while they're talking, we're thinking about what we're going to say, and how we're going to

answer what they're going to say. So we're not really even hearing what they're saying; we're preparing our own little speech at this time.

The Bible says we need to learn to listen. Now, let me tell you how to listen. Let me give you some words. The very first word is observation. Listen not merely with your ears; listen with your eyes. Do you find it difficult to talk to somebody who's looking away from you? When your spouse talks, even if you're in an argument, look straight in their face. If you're looking at them, they have every right to assume that you're listening to them. If you're looking away, they probably will assume that you are not listening to them, you're not interested in them.

You see, when you watch a person, when you watch a person, when you listen to a person, and you look at that person, you can tell things about them. You can read their body language. You can read their facial expressions. Look into a person's eyes. The poets have said it, and it's true, that the eyes are the mirror of the soul. You can see joy, you can see fear, you can see anger, you can see confusion, by looking into a person's face. So, listen by observation. Lean forward, be interested, and it will pay great dividends.

But now, listen. Not only observation, but concentration. This is very hard for me, to focus on what the other person is saying. To concentrate and to listen, not only with your ears and your eyes, but with your mind. And, especially if you're tired, if you're stressed, if you're preoccupied, or, again, if you're egocentric, you're not going to be concentrating on what your mate is saying. As a matter of fact, psychologists tell us that we really get about twenty percent of a conversation. It is amazing how much people fail to hear what is being said.

As a matter of fact, I can put this down as a certainty. If you will get a tape of this message and listen to it after you've sat here in this congregation and listened to it, you will hear many things that I said that you never heard. They will go right past you, because your mind will check in and check back, and check out and check in again, and we simply check in and out to get an idea of what he is saying, and then our minds go off somewhere else.

Now, what happens in church happens also in conversations between husbands and wives. And so, you've got to focus; you've got to concentrate. That's the reason I encourage people to listen to a message with an open Bible, and with a notebook, and make notes, even if you never use the notes—to listen, to write down, to hear what is being said. Learn to concentrate on your mate. Now, listen. I am talking about observation; I am talking about concentration.

Here's the third thing: consideration. Think about what your mate is saying. You have got to listen with your mind. Turn it over in your mind. Think about the words that

they use. Why did they choose those particular words? Think about the meaning behind those particular words; don't jump to conclusions. Sometimes your mate will use words they don't really mean; sometimes they'll get it twisted. And you say, aha, you said it wrong. That makes no difference. Listen to what they mean, not what they say. Absorb the feelings; consider what is being said.

Learn to listen. And then, not only must there be that observation, not only must there be that concentration, not only must there be that consideration, but here is something very, very important. When you listen, there has to be that clarification. Think it thru till you get it straight. Sometimes after Joyce and I have had a conflict, I will go to my study and write down what I think I heard—to clarify, to get it in my mind.

Folks, it is hard to communicate. You'd have to be a preacher to know just how hard it is to communicate. I want you to listen to this sentence. Now, just listen to it, and see if you know what I'm saying after I have finished it. Here's what one mate says to another, I know that you believe that you understand what you think I said, but I'm not sure you realize what you heard is not what I meant. Do you understand that? Listen to it again. I know you believe that you understand what you think I said, but I'm not sure you realize what you heard is not what I meant. Now, a sentence like that helps you understand just how hard communication is.

So here's rule number one—here's rule number one. Listen to it. Tune in. Husbands, tune into her. Lady, tune into him, if you would learn how to resolve conflicts.

II. Tone Down

Are you ready for rule number two? Number one: tune in. Rule number two: tone down. Listen to it again: "Wherefore my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear—that's tune in—slow to speak"—tone down. Your words are going to get you into trouble. I've learned that. Proverbs chapter 10, verse 19: "In the multitude of words, there wanteth not sin, but he that refraineth his lips is wise." Proverbs 17, verse 27: "He that hath knowledge spareth his words." If you're smart, you're not going to talk so much. Proverbs 21, verse 23: "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue, keepeth his soul from troubles." Folks, that's not Adrian; that's the Word of God.

Be slow to speak. Ecclesiastes 5, verse 3: "And a fool's voice is known by the multitude of words." Speech is silver, but silence is golden. Now, when you are talking, you can't be listening; and, when you're not listening, you're not learning. And so, the Bible says we're to be swift to hear; we are to be slow to speak.

Now, I said that God gave us two ears and one mouth. The old rabbis used to say God gave us both ears—they're out, they're exposed, they're easy to be seen; but God put our tongue behind some iron bars to guard it inside, to show that we ought to listen

twice as much as we speak.

Now, I just want you to put your bookmark there in James, and I want you to turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 13 with me for a moment, and let me show you how you must speak when you do speak. He's talking here about love. And I want you to read in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, verses 4 thru 7: "Love suffereth long and is kind. Love envieth not. Love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth."

Now, with that in mind, remember that all of 1 Corinthians 13 is actually talking about the tongue. By the way, the tongue is a subject that's in everybody's mouth. Did you know that? He's talking about the tongue, He's talking about the tongue, and He gives us some rules for using our tongue. Now, this would apply everywhere, but it certainly applies in marriage.

With these verses in mind, I want you to think of some destructive games that we play between husbands and wives. Sometimes we want to play the judge. We want to be the judge, the jury, and the executioner. And we want to play the blame game, and blame our mate.

It goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden when Adam wanted to blame Eve. We assign guilt; we say it's all your fault, you should be ashamed. Listen. If you in your marriage find yourself talking to your mate saying words like this: you always, or, you never, that's so destructive. Don't ever begin the sentence with, you this, or, you that, because what you're doing, you're playing the judge, and that's not kind. The Bible says, love is kind. Rather than saying, you always, or, you never, why don't you say, I feel, or, I need, or, it seems to me.

I want to list some words here, and I want you to listen to them and see if these words sound like your conversations. "I told you so." "You're just like your father." "You're just like your mother." "You're always in a bad mood." "You just don't think it's your fault." "What's wrong with you?" "All you ever do is complain." "I can't do anything to please you." "You're getting just what you deserve." "Why don't you listen to me?" "Why can't you be more responsible?" "What on earth were you thinking?" "You are impossible." "I don't know why I put up with you." "If you don't like it, you can just leave." "That was stupid." "All you ever do is think of yourself." "You're such a baby." "You deserve a dose of your own medicine." "Why do you think you always have to be right?" Sound like anybody you know?

If those are words that come into your conversations, here's the game that you're playing. You're playing the judge. Sometimes the jury, and sometimes the executioner. But the Bible says, love is kind. Now, there are some folks who don't play the judge.

Here's another game they want to play. They want to play the professor. Do you know who the professor is? He is the one who always acts superior. He's the one who always talks down to the other person, and his conversations, or her conversations, are filled with constant put-downs. Things like: "That's stupid," or "That doesn't make sense," or "Why don't you think and just listen to me for a little bit," or "You wouldn't understand that, because, after all, you're a woman," or, "You wouldn't understand that, because you're a man, and men are so stupid." Sometimes women just put it in one word: "men." Now, that means men just don't have the capability to understand. And you assume that you as the professor are the one who knows everything.

One man said to his wife, I can't understand how God made you so beautiful and so stupid at the same time. She said, that's easy, God made me beautiful, so you would be attracted to me. He made me stupid, so I'd be attracted to you. Playing the professor, talking down. You see, when you talk down to somebody, what you do is you're attacking their self-worth or self-esteem, and they're going to get defensive, and an argument's going to begin.

But the Bible says, love vaunteth not itself. Do you see that? You can't play the professor and be full of love.

And then, here's another game. You want to play the psychologist, and that's another destructive game. You're puffed up, and love is not puffed up, but you assume that you understand everything about the other individual, and you say, let me tell you why you said that. Or let me tell you what you were thinking. Do you know why you think that way?

Now, folks, the Bible says we're not to judge somebody else's heart. You're not a psychologist, to psychoanalyze another person, and to assign motives to another person. Only God can do that. Don't play the judge. Don't play the professor. Don't play the psychologist.

Here's another game that a lot of folks love to play. They love to play the historian. But the Bible says that love thinketh no evil. That is, it doesn't keep a record of wrongs. But some folks, when they get into this thing, they are the historian, and they want to correct every detail. I know that's wrong; it was on a Tuesday. It was not on a Thursday, or, you said this, or you said that. They go back into the past sometimes, and bring up re-runs of old arguments; they have never disconnected the past.

Many times, that's a diversionary smokescreen. As the historian keeps very careful records, they have their little book of rights and wrongs that are done. But the Bible says that love thinketh no evil. It does not keep a count of evil.

Now, here's another game that people play when they speak, and ought not to play. Not the historian, not the psychologist, not the professor, not the judge, but there are

some people that want to be the dictator—and I pity you if you are married to one of these. And the dictator can be the man or the woman.

This is the individual who wants to rule by show of force. And when you get into an argument with these individuals, they will say something like this: I demand that you do this, or I will not allow that in my house. Sometimes men who think, because they're the head of the house, they're little Lord Ha-Ha, or something like that, and they play the dictator.

Never make ultimatums to your spouse. That's ungodly. Never make veiled threats—that's even worse. What do you mean, Pastor, by a veiled threat? You might say to your mate, you try that one more time and see what happens. That's so unproductive. The honeymoon is generally that period of time between I do, and you'd better. That's what the dictator plays, and how do you coerce another individual as a dictator? How can you do this in marriage? Well, of course, there's physical coercion, where a man will abuse a woman physically or vice versa. Sometimes women have been known to beat up men. Never, never, no never ever, ever, ever resort to physical abuse.

But not only is there physical coercion; sometimes a person can become a neurotic invalid when they're not truly sick. As a way of getting even with the other individual, and really to rule the roost. Sometimes men withhold money in order to be the dictator in the family. Sometimes a woman will withhold affection, or the man will withhold affection. Sometimes the martyr will just simply sulk.

Do you know what happens when you play the dictator? That is so cruel. Do you know what you're saying to another individual, when you demand they do this, or you demand they do that? You're saying to that individual, I can do a better job with your life than you can. And it's absolutely cruel.

Now, another game that's an unproductive game, if you don't play the dictator, you may want to play the critic, and God knows there are some of those out here. You compare your mate with other people. You ask this question: why can't you be like she is, or why can't you be like Susan's husband? Why can't you?

Or, on the other hand, you're just like your mother, or you're just like your father, and you compare. But the Bible says that love does not behave itself unseemly. That's one of the most unseemly things you can do. And why is it so unseemly? Especially when you compare your mate with somebody else about traits that they have that that your mate can never have. Your mate may have no control over these things—physical traits, parents, upbringing. How cruel it is to compare your mate to somebody else, and especially over something over which they have no control.

Here's the last one that you need not to play. Don't play the preacher. Don't try to

get Adrian's sermons and re-preach them to your mate. Love rejoiceth not in iniquity; it rejoices in the truth; it does not use the Bible as a club. Don't appear holier than thou. Don't say to your mate, well, if you were godly, you would forgive me. Let God tell her, tell him, to forgive.

I quoted, several Sundays ago, what Ruth Graham is reported to have said. She said, concerning husbands and wives, and she said this word to the wife: "It is your job to love your husband; it is God's job to make him good."

Don't play these games. They're so non-productive. Now, the Bible says that you're to guard your tongue. Listen—listen carefully. Speak, and speak wisely. But now, we come to the final of these three things, and look very carefully. What He says is this: he says, tune in. What He says is this: he says, tone down.

III. Lighten Up

And then, what he says is this: lighten up. Go back to our text again. He says we are to be slow to wrath. That is, don't have a hair trigger; don't get upset so easily; don't get disturbed so quickly. Be slow to wrath. The Amplified Version gives it this way: be slow to take offense and to get angry.

Now notice, He doesn't say that you should never get angry. Now, that's impossible. As a matter of fact, it would be sinful for you not to get angry. You wouldn't be like Jesus, if you never got angry. Jesus got angry. The Bible says, in Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 26, we're to be angry and sin not. Now, you can be angry and not sin, because Jesus was angry, and He never sinned. Mark chapter 3, verse 5, speaks of Jesus, and says, and when He had looked around about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their heart.

Some things ought to make you angry—righteous anger. If you see a little child being abused, that ought to anger you. If you see somebody peddling dope, that ought to anger you. If you see these pornographers who are infiltrating and corrupting the minds of our youth, that ought to anger you.

How can you be angry and sin not? Well, number one, you have to be angry for the right reason. Jesus was angry at sin. And the way to be angry and to sin not, is to be angry only at sin; and to be angry, not only for the right reason, but at the right things; not at the sinner, but at the sin. And to be angry in the right way, that your anger is to move you to do something about a situation that is wrong. But what our Lord is talking about and warning about here is an uncontrolled temper.

Now, if you're a husband or wife, and you have an uncontrolled temper, you're given to temper tantrums, let me describe something about you. Number one, you're very foolish. Are you listening? Now, if that made you upset, you come to me after the

service and apologize to me, and I'll forgive you. But you are very foolish. Ecclesiastes chapter 7 and verse 9: "Anger resteth in the bosom of fools."

Now, don't go explaining it because of your red hair, or your family, or your genes and chromosomes. You are a very foolish person if you're angry. I'm going to tell you something else. You have a very weak character if you get needlessly, uncontrollably angry. Proverbs 16, verse 32: "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh the city." If you cannot rule your spirit, then, friend, you have a weak character. And I'm telling you this: If you don't learn to control your anger, you're going to find that your anger's going to bring you into all other kinds of sins in your marriage and in your professional life.

Proverbs 29, verse 22: "An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression." That's the reason the Bible says, be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath. When you get angry, it is like throwing a rock into a wasp's nest. You're going to stir up things that you wish that you never stirred up. Now, suppose your mate is an angry mate. Suppose your mate gets angry with you. What should you do? Let me tell you some things not to do.

Don't practice avoidance. What I mean by that is, don't try to get away, and act like my mate is really not angry at all. Or, you just simply take that anger of your mate, and you just stuff it, and you have the idea, well, if I back away, maybe it will go away. Now, you're not helping your mate, when you do that. You can only stuff it so long. You say, well, I'll put it down in the basement. Well, I'll tell you what it will do. It will come out of the basement window, and come around back into the front door. Don't stuff it; don't let that be cause of a fear of confrontation, and your mate gets angry. Don't avoid the conflict by just simply backing off—your stomach will keep the score. Don't practice avoidance.

Don't practice appeasement. Now, listen carefully. Don't practice avoidance, and don't practice appeasement. It's a very unhealthy marriage when one mate always gives in, in order to have peace and to appease the other. When one mate always gets his or her way, or gets his or her way most of the time, seems to dominate, your marriage is in serious trouble. Appeasement. One man said, "I like to go to the seashore, my wife likes to go to the mountains; so we compromise and go to the mountains." Well now, if that's the kind of a marriage that you have, ultimately it's going to end up on the rocks. And, if he gets violent, and you get silent, your marriage is headed for trouble. Because one of these days those smoldering rags that are down in your heart are going to burst into an open flame, and your home is going to be engulfed in those flames. Or else, if it doesn't open and erupt into a raging fire, if you keep it stuffed down there, your mates anger, you just keep it stuffed down there in your heart

and in your life, you're going to develop a martyr complex. You're going to be a self-pitying person, and you're going to be living, even though you may not separate, with an emotional divorce.

Don't practice avoidance, don't practice appeasement, and don't practice aggression. Don't give anger for anger. Speak the truth. Speak it in love, never sarcastically, if your mate is angry with you, or you're angry with your mate—not avoidance, not appeasement, and not aggression. I'm going to tell you how, when you find these times, and we all find ourselves in them, what to do.

The Bible says you're to be slow to wrath. Now, let me give you some very practical things before I get into these other things. Make sure that, if you're going to have an argument, make sure, if you can, that you have it at the right time. Do you know when most arguments take place? Just before we eat. Now, psychologists have told us this—marriage counselors. Why is that? Your blood sugar is down, and you are a little more nervous. For goodness sake, if you're going to have an argument, don't have it just before meals. Ninety percent of the arguments take place then.

Secondly, on the way to some social event—have you and your wife ever gotten in an argument going to a party? Isn't that the weirdest thing? Going to some social event, for some reason, I don't know why, we tend to want to get in arguments. But if we do that, then we're in such a terrible state when we're there, because we can't talk it out, and we're trying to act nice around other people. So make certain it's the right time.

Number two, the right tone. When you talk, keep your words soft and sweet; you may have to eat them.

Number three, the right turf. The right time, the right tone, the right turf. Don't ever discuss problems with your mate when other people are around. Have you ever noticed that sometimes a wife will criticize her husband in front of the husband's best friends, or the husband will criticize the wife? Do you know why they do that? They're cowards. They figure he can't answer back when thus-and-such a person is there, and it's really a cheap shot. Now, what do you do? When you've got the right time, you're speaking in the right tone, you're on the right turf, what do you do?

Well, let me give you just three things, and I'll be finished. Number one, practice accommodation. Accommodate yourself to the other person. I'm not talking about compromise, but accommodation. If you and your mate are so different, why don't you accommodate yourself to him or to her. Learn something about his sport; learn something about her hobby.

Practice, number two, acceptance. Now, folks, I am different from Joyce. I have accepted Joyce. Joyce is different from me. She has accepted me. I have given up trying to change Joyce. I am not going to change her. I can't change her. I wouldn't if I

could, most of the time. You do not change a person so you can love them. If you do want to change them, the best way to do it is to love them so you can change them—you can't change the other individual. Joyce is different from me temperamentally. She's different from me psychologically. She's different from me physically, and I am different from her.

And so, we just simply have to accept the other individual. Never marry a person to make them over. Quit trying to change your mate. Getting married is like buying a phonograph record. You buy it because you want what's on one side, you just take what comes on the other side, and that's the way it is in marriage.

Our families, the Rogers family is so different from the Gentry family. Around my family, there were always wisecracks going back and forth—zingers, zoom, zing, zing, like that—all around the dinner table, all the time. If you knew my mama, you'd understand what I'm talking about. Don't ever get in a battle of wits with Mama; she's sharp. And I'd listen to all of that. When I was a child around Joyce's house, there was none of that, and it's just different. Around Joyce's house, holidays and birthdays were very special. Around my house, they weren't. I don't know why; it's just the difference in the families.

Practice, friend, accommodation, practice acceptance, and practice adjustment. Change; be willing to change. If she wants to go to bed earlier, go to bed earlier. If you want to stay up later, let her sometimes stay up later with you, rather than having a war where both lose. Have a compromise where both can gain.

Conclusion

Now, listen; listen to me, folks; listen to a man who is happily married—not because I am so wonderful. Very frankly, if you knew some of the dark recesses of my heart, you wouldn't even let me be the pastor of this church. I am a bad hombre. The only good thing about me is the grace of God, and, were it not for the grace of God, our marriage would not have lasted, I'm telling you. But, I'm going to tell you, on the other hand, we have a wonderfully happy home. And the reason for it—listen very carefully—the reason for it is Jesus.

I told you at the introduction to this message that everybody needs three homes. He needs a family home; he needs a church home; he needs a heavenly home. And Jesus Christ is the key to all three. So, have you given your heart to Christ? Are you saved? Do you know that you know that He lives in your heart, because only by His love, 1 Corinthians chapter thirteen-type love, can you really truly be the husband or the wife that you need to be.

Would you bow your heads in prayer? Heads are bowed; eyes are closed. If you are

already saved, I want you to begin to pray for those who may not be saved that may be around you. It might be your husband, it might be your wife, it might be your child, your father, your mother, your brother, your sister, your neighbor; it might be a stranger that you don't know. Would you say, "Lord, if they're not saved, just help them to trust you right now." And, if you're not saved, would you pray right now, "Lord, I need you. I want to know you personally. Help me right now that I might give my heart to you." And, if you do want to give your heart to the Lord, let me lead you in a prayer. And I can promise you on the authority of the Word of God, if you'll pray this prayer, and mean it, Jesus will save you. "Dear God, I'm a sinner, and I'm lost; and my sin deserves judgment, but I want mercy. I want to be saved, I want to be forgiven. I want you to live in my life, I want you to live in my home. I want you to take me to heaven, I need you, God. Lord Jesus, you died to save me, and you promised to save me, if I would trust you. I do trust you, Lord Jesus. Right now in this seat, this morning. Right now, right now, I trust you. I believe that you died for my sin. I believe that God raised you from the dead. And now, I trust you only to save me. I don't look to my goodness. I don't depend upon my feelings. I trust you. Come into my heart. Forgive my sin. Save me, Lord Jesus." Pray that prayer. Pray that prayer. "Save me, Lord Jesus." Pray it; pray it from your heart: Save me, Lord Jesus. Did you ask Him? Then take the next step, and pray this way, "I trust you to save me. Thank you for doing it. I trust you to save me. Thank you for doing it. I don't ask for feeling, and I don't look for a sign. I stand on your Word. I am trusting you. You're now my Lord, and my Savior, my God, and my friend. Now, Lord Jesus, because you died for me, I will live for you and follow you the rest of my life. By your grace, and for your glory. Amen."

Now, look up here. If you prayed that prayer, listen to me very carefully; in the back row, up in the balcony, listen very carefully. If you prayed that prayer, the next thing that you ought to do is to make it public that you are not ashamed of Jesus Christ. The Bible says, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." So, in just a moment, we are going to be singing an invitational hymn, and no one is going to leave unless it is an emergency. Ministers are going to be in that aisle way up in the balcony, and at the head of each of these aisles. And, if you prayed that prayer, and asked Jesus Christ to come into your heart, here's what you ought to do. You ought to leave your seat and come forward. You're coming forward gives Him glory. It helps settle it and seal it in your heart that you meant business. Because the Bible says, "let the redeemed of the Lord say so." And Jesus said, "If you are willing to confess me before men, I'll confess you before my Father in heaven."

Standing at the head of each of these aisles will be a minister. When you come forward, just tell that minister you're trusting Christ. If you still have questions, we have

an open Bible. We want to give you some Scripture to stand on and seal your decision in prayer. It'll take just a short time, but I want you to leave your seat and come forward. This is a wonderful, wonderful time for husbands and wives to take each other by the hand, and say, "Let's go and give our hearts and our homes to Jesus." Friend, you cannot have the home you want and that God wants you to have without building it on Christ the solid rock. Now, if you're already saved, and you don't have a church home, husbands and wives, why don't you come forward today? Teenagers, others—and say, "I want this church to be my church home." Maybe you're widowed, maybe you're divorced, maybe you're from a broken home—that's all the more reason you need the church family. So, you need to come as a Christian, if that's what you are, a Christian, and saved, and say, "I want to place my membership here in this church." If you're with a friend that needs to make a decision, you may volunteer to come forward with your friend. How beautiful to see one friend bring another friend to Jesus. Be in a spirit of prayer now. From all over this auditorium, I'm going to trust that many are coming to Jesus.

Let's stand together as we sing. God bless you. Praise the Lord. God bless this dear lady. God bless this family. God bless this couple. God bless this precious lady. God bless this dear family. God bless this lady. That's right, come on to Jesus. God bless you. God bless these girls. God bless this lady and this man. Come on to Jesus. God bless this couple, praise the Lord. That's right, come on to Christ; come on to Jesus. Sing while others are coming. I have heard your pleading. Come to Jesus, come. Hallelujah. God bless this dear lady, hallelujah. Come on. Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. Those who are on their way, just keep on coming.

How to Handle Conflicts

By Adrian Rogers

Sermon Date: May 5, 1996

Main Scripture Text: James 1:19

Outline

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Conclusion

Introduction

Take your Bibles, and find James chapter 1, would you, please, and, when you've found it, look up here. In a moment, we're going to begin reading in verse 19—One Lord, One Love. Achieving intimacy in marriage: that is not easy. Why is it? Well, we're different, male and female. We've been talking about the differences. We are wired differently—emotionally, psychologically. We are different physically, but then, besides that, we come from different backgrounds, different family expectations and traditions, and things that we've learned from childhood. Then, you add to that the temperamental differences; we have different temperaments. And then, add to that the old sinful nature. Amen? They put that in a mix, and that says we are to live, in spite of all of that, we are to live intimately. And boys and girls are different in many ways, and every individual boy and every individual girl is very different.

When I first started liking Joyce, we were just grade-school sweethearts. Well, actually, we weren't sweethearts, when we first met. As a matter of fact, when I first met her, she tried to hit me with a palm frond off of a palm tree. I made up my mind I was going to change that, and, she'll get me for telling this afterward, but I remember sitting looking there across at Joyce. She sat a few desks up from me, and I was watching her, and I thought she was about the prettiest thing that I'd ever seen, and I still do, and I walked by her desk and dropped a love note, and she still has that love note. That's in the archives, that love note I dropped by her desk in the sixth grade. But we're different, and the longer we live together, the more I realize just how different we are. But I began to recognize the difference one day when we had gone to a carnival, and there was a huge Ferris wheel, and I talked Joyce into taking a ride on the Ferris wheel, and the Ferris wheel went around halfway and stopped with our gondola at the very top, and we

were just sitting there. So I thought it would be jolly fun to rock it back and forth some. I discovered a very real difference between Joyce and Adrian at that time, and those differences are very real, but they're what helps to put a dynamic and a wonderful tension in marriage. But, nonetheless, there are differences in my home and in your home, in my marriage and your marriage, that need to be resolved.

Now, thank God, God has told us how to do that, and, incidentally, the title of the message today is "How To Fight Fair"—"How to Fight Fair." Husbands and wives fight. Is that a surprise to you? They do. I mean, in the best of marriages, they fight. I'm not talking about physical fights; most of them are verbal and emotional. But, husbands and wives, in the best of marriages, they have some very strong differences, and very real contentions. And, the difference in marriages is primarily how you resolve those differences.

Now, where are you going to go to find out how to resolve those differences? Well, of course, no better place to go than the Word of God. It was God who made male and female. It is God who ordained marriage. It is God who teaches us how to dwell together as heirs of the grace of life. I don't know two more wonderful verses than the two we're going to look at right now in James chapter 1 and verse 19. "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath"—that is, slow to get angry—"for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

I. Tune In

Now, three rules. We're talking about how to fight fair. Please listen. Write these down. First of all, the Bible says we are to be swift to hear. Now, just put this down: we need to tune in to our mate—to tune in. Most husbands and many wives need to learn to listen. Now, what's the importance of listening? Why does God say to tune in? Well, when you listen to your mate, it will encourage your mate to talk. Is that bad, or is that good? Well, it's good, because when you encourage your mate to talk, your mate will express himself or herself. When your mate talks, then you will understand an individual, because you can't understand them until they express themselves; and, when you come to true understanding, then you'll come to true intimacy. Now, therefore, you must learn to listen, to encourage your mate—husband or wife—to express themselves. The reason that many of us don't listen is that we're so full of ego and defensiveness. We're afraid to listen. We're afraid we may learn some things about ourselves that we don't want to hear, or we may assume that we already know what our mate is going to say, so we just tune them out, or maybe finish the sentence for them, or most of the time we're preparing what we're going to say as a response, so we're not really listening, and so we need to learn how to listen.

I want to give you four rules for listening, and I'm learning these myself. I will not say that I have learned them, but number one is, write down the word observation. Do you have it? Observation. When you listen to an individual, listen with your eyes as well as your ears, and observe the other person. Look at the expression on their face. Read the body language. Look particularly into their eyes; the eyes are the mirror of the soul. The Bible has so much to say about our eyes. If you look into a person's eyes, if you're perceptive, you can see joy, or you can see fear, or you can see sadness, or you can see anger, or you can see confusion, as you look into a person's eyes. Now, if you look away from an individual while they're talking to you, what does your body language say to them when they look at you? When you look away from an individual who's speaking to you, your body language says, "I am not paying attention to you," or, "If I am paying attention to you, I don't like what I am hearing." So lean forward. Nod your head. Maybe put your thumbs under your chin. Smile, and look into the face of your mate, whether you're having an argument, or whether you're not having an argument. First of all, observation.

Now, here's the second word I want you to write down. Not only observation, but I want you to write down concentration. You need to focus. Did you know the psychologists tell us that we really hear only about twenty percent of what is spoken? If you don't believe that is true, get a tape of a sermon, a sermon that you listened to in this auditorium, and you'll say, "I didn't hear him say that. I didn't hear him say that. I didn't hear him say that." He said it, but you didn't hear it, because it went right past. Your mind goes out and it comes back in. It goes back out and it comes back in. You think about what you're going to have for dinner today, or who you're going to eat supper with tonight, what you're going to do tomorrow, next week, or about some business deal, and what you have to do when your mate is talking to you, the one that you love more than anybody else. Give them the courtesy of concentration. Concentrate on what that individual is saying. You will be amazed how much you've been missing by not doing what the Bible says, and that is to tune in.

Now, number three. Not only observation, and concentration, but consideration. That's the third word I want you to write down: consideration. Think about what they're saying. I mean, consider it. Don't assume that you already know. Listen to their words. Words are powerful things; but listen not only to what the words say, but what the words mean. Now, they may get the words confused a little bit. They may, in anger or frustration, overstate something, exaggerate something, or say it backward, when they're frustrated. Don't try to catch them in an error, but listen to the meaning of their words. Try to concentrate and consider what they're saying. What are the feelings? What are the emotions as well as the words? Listen very, very concentratedly, and

consider what is being said.

And then, last of all, the fourth word is clarification—observation, concentration, consideration, and clarification. Think it through. Make certain that you understand what your mate is saying. I was listening to some marriage counsel, advice, the other day, and I think it's real good. Allow your mate to talk and express himself or herself completely, and once they have said everything they've wanted to say without interruption, especially if it is on a subject where you two are having disagreement, after they have said it completely and you've not interrupted them, then you say to him or to her, "Now, let me see if I can restate what you've said." You'll be amazed how many times you will not restate what they think they have said, and they say, "No, that is not what I said. Now, let me say it again." It is so important that we come to this point of clarification, because you know, in talking, there's always what we say and what we think we said. There's always what we hear, and what we thought we heard. So what does the Bible say? What is this wonderful advice from the Word of God? The Bible says we are to tune in; we are to be swift to hear. Now, folks, that is so simple, but that is so dynamically important. Have you got it? Number one, be swift to hear. Tune in.

II. Tone Down

Number two: Listen. Be slow to speak. Tone down. Tune in; tone down. God gave you two ears, one mouth. The old rabbis used to say, "The ears are open and out; they're unguarded, but the tongue is behind those ivory bars." We're expected to listen twice as much as we speak. You see, when you're talking, you're not learning; and when you're not learning, you're not communicating; and when you're not communicating, there will be no intimacy. So what we are to do is to watch our mouths. Now, let me tell you something. Your tongue can get you into a lot of trouble. I'm talking about there's nothing that can do more damage to your marriage than your words. Let me give you some scriptures just for your margin. Proverbs chapter 10, verse 19: "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin, but he that refraineth his lips is wise." Or listen to this—Proverbs chapter 17 and verse 27: "He that hath knowledge spareth his words." That is, if you're smart, you won't talk so much. Proverbs 21, verse 23: "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul." Now, what he's talking about in this context, he's not talking about failing to communicate. Don't any man come away from here and say, "The pastor said I'm not to talk with you, sweetheart. I'm just to be a silent type." No, that's not what he's saying. He's just saying, "Watch your words!" Watch your words. Keep them warm and sweet; you may have to eat them. Watch your words. It's very clear. Ecclesiastes chapter 5, verse 3: "And a fool's voice is known by a multitude of words." Some wise man has said that speech is silver, but silence may be golden.

And so, just don't talk so much. Now, let me tell you some conversational mistakes, and especially when husbands and wives are having a disagreement. Let me tell you some bad games that husbands and wives play. Before I do that, however, to set this in context, and we're talking about toning down. I want you to turn to what the Apostle Paul said about the tongue in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, and begin reading in verse 4. Now I want to say that 1 Corinthians chapter 13 deals with the use of the tongue. That's what this whole chapter deals with. Starts out in verse 1: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as a sounding brass, or tinkling cymbal." Now, keep that in mind, and go down to verse 4: "Charity..."—that means love, and I'm going to read it "love" from here on—"Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never fails." And he's talking about love, in consideration, and in the context of the tongue.

Now, with all of that in mind, when James says, "Be slow to speak," when Paul tells us that love controls our language, let me tell you some unfruitful games that people play. Sometimes people want to play the judge. When husbands and wives get into an argument, there's one who will assume the position of judge. He wants to lay the blame; he wants to lay out the argument; then he wants to lay down the sentence; and then he wants to give the punishment. He becomes judge, jury, and executioner, or she may do that, and the person who plays the judge, you can always tell the person who likes to play the judge, because they like to use words like this: "You always," or "you never." Does your mate do that? Now, no elbows today. No elbows, but just think about it. Are you the one that does that? By the way, let me just give you some phrases. I'm going to list about twenty-five phrases that will come in your conversation if you're the person who likes to play the judge. See if any of these are heard around your house: I told you so. You're just like your father. You're just like your mother. You're always in a bad mood. You just don't think. It's your fault. What's wrong with you? All you ever do is complain. I can't do anything to please you. You're getting what you deserve. Why don't you ever listen to me? Why can't you be more responsible? What on earth were you thinking? You are impossible. I don't know why I put up with you. If you don't like it, you can just leave. That was stupid. All you ever do is think of yourself. You're such a baby. You deserve a dose of your own medicine. You think you're always right. Now, if those are the kinds of words that are part of your conversation, you don't have to say all those at the same time, but if those are the kinds of sentences that have slipped in, do you know the game that you are playing? You're playing the judge, the jury, and the

executioner. It's my duty as your pastor to tell you to quit it.

Now, let me tell you, there's another game that people like to play: not the judge, they like to play the professor. And, by the way, what does the Bible say about love? It says love is kind, and a kind person is not the judge, jury, and the executioner. Now, here's another game people like to play. They like to play the professor. Do you know who the professor is? He's the one who assumes the superior position in the marriage, and he likes to put down his mate, or she likes to put down her husband, and with words like, you'll never measure up; or, you're stupid; or, if you had an ounce of brains, you wouldn't know it; or why, you wouldn't understand this—you're a woman. Or, women don't even put it in a sentence; they just say one word, "men." Men. It's like, you're a man? You couldn't possibly understand, because you just happen to be a man. Playing the professor. Playing superior to the other person. One man said to his wife, "How could you be so beautiful and so stupid at the same time?" She said, "That's easy." She said, "God made me beautiful so you would be attracted to me. He made me stupid so I'd be attracted to you." Playing the professor. The Bible says that love doesn't vaunt itself. It's not puffed up. It does not assume superiority.

And then, here's a third game that you ought not to play: playing the psychologist. And there are many who like to play the psychologist. Now, they think that they have an insight into why the other person does what they do, and so they're always psychoanalyzing the other person, and they're saying something like this, "Uh-huh. Now, let me tell you why you said that." Or, "Do you know why you think that way?" And they're trying to assign motives, to judge the other person's heart and mind, like a little two-bit, self-made psychologist. That's so contrary to the law of love in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, where the Bible says that love is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly.

There are other people who like to play this game: you like to play the historian. You, for some reason, have a memory of every argument that's ever taken place, of every bad thing your husband has done, every bad thing your wife has done, and whenever you get into a family conflict, you bring out your little mental notebook. You remind the individual of this thing and that thing, when it happened, what the dates are, what she said, what he said, what I said, ta da da da da da da da da, and what that is, is a diversionary tactic—not wanting to face the situation today as it is. Now, if you enjoy playing the historian, the Bible says, love does not keep an account of evil. There are some things you had better bury in the grave of God's forgetfulness, and quit being the judge, quit being the professor, quit being the psychologist, quit being the historian, and quit being the dictator.

This is what happens in many homes. One of the mates becomes a dictator. It can

be the man; it can be the woman. The dictator's a person who is a bully. They may be a physical bully; they may be a verbal bully; they may be a financial bully. They may be a psychological bully, but they bully their way around in a home. You know, when a person is dictatorial, he'll say things like this: Don't you ever do that again. I demand that that stop. I will not allow that in this house. Ta da da da da da da. Many times, the dictator is the husband. He thinks he's little Lord Ha-Ha, that God made him the head of the house, and he thinks it's his job to force his wife to do this or that, because he's the head. I want to remind you that Jesus Christ is the Head of the church; He's never made me do anything. Jesus Christ is the Lord of the church, not the dictator of the church. Has He ever made you do anything? Has Jesus Christ ever forced you to do one single solitary thing? Not one. He leads by love. Sometimes, how do the dictators work? What do they use? Well, sometimes physical force. If you're a man that beats up on your wife, you know what ought to happen to you? Well, I'd better not say. Never, ever, by physical force, try to get your way. You're a coward and a bully. Sometimes, a woman will do just the opposite. She will become a neurotic invalid to bully her husband. And I'm not talking about true invalids. I'm not talking about true people who have genuine illnesses and sicknesses and problems, but sometimes a person will become a dictator by becoming a neurotic. Sometimes a husband will become a dictator by withholding money; sometimes a wife by withholding love and sexual intimacy. You know what the dictator says? The dictator says—he doesn't say it out loud, but here's what he says, if you analyze it: "I am more important than you are, and I can do more with your life than you can do with it. You don't have a right to make up your own mind, and, when I want your opinion, I'll give it to you." That's what the dictator says.

Now, let me tell you another game that you ought not to play. Don't play the dictator. Don't play the critic. The fourth, there are few things that will break up your domestic tranquility more than playing the critic. Do you know who the critic is? The critic is the person who loves to compare you to other people. Why can't you be more like John? Why aren't you more like Susan? How come thus-and-such, their house is this way, and our house is that way? Why does Mrs. So-and-So, why's she able to entertain, and you're not able to entertain? And, you criticize and compare your husband or your wife to somebody else. Don't do that. Or you might compare negatively: "You're just like your father." "You are just like your mother." And, you criticize that way, comparing negatively. And I think the cruelest cut of all when the critic criticizes an individual for something over which they have no control: over physical traits, over background, over intellectual capacity, and other things. How cruel that is! To criticize an individual about something over which they have no control whatsoever. The Bible says that love does not behave itself unseemly. That's one of the most unseemly things that an individual

can do.

Now, here's the last of these games that you ought not to play, if you would like to do what the Bible says, "Be slow to speak," and that is to play the preacher, to give your mate a rerun of Dr. Rogers' sermon, and say, "Preacher said this, or the preacher said that," or even more than this, for you to become the preacher, and to become holier-than-thou, become self-righteous. Now, the Bible is a wonderful sword, but it's a very poor club, and for you to go beating your mate over the head with a Bible club is very unproductive. For you to ever say, "The Bible teaches that you're supposed to forgive me." It may do that, but, friend, it's not up for you to say that to them. If you get forgiveness, it is of the grace of God; no one can demand forgiveness. You just simply don't play the preacher.

I remind you of what I said several weeks ago, quoting Mrs. Billy Graham, whom we all admire. She gave this advice to women. She said, "Do not nag your husband. It is your job to love him. It is God's job to make him good." So, don't play the preacher; don't play the critic; don't play the psychologist; don't play the judge, the jury, and the executioner. All of these things are so unfruitful. Listen to what God's Word says. God's Word says, tune in. God's Word says, tone down.

III. Lighten Up

Now, here's the third thing God's Word says. God's Word says, lighten up. Be slow to wrath. There's nothing that will do more damage to your home than unwarranted anger. The Bible says, in Ephesians 4, verse 26, "Be angry, and sin not, and do not let the sun go down upon your wrath." Never go to bed back to back, or in separate beds, because you are angry. Now, there is righteous anger; there's good anger. Jesus was angry, but Jesus was angry for the right reason, over the right things, in the right way. But if you're one of these people, and you have an ungovernable anger, you need to get on your face before Almighty God and confess it, not as a weakness, but as a wickedness. It will destroy your home.

Now, if you're an angry person, given to anger, let me tell you what the Bible says about you, and it won't be flattering. Number one: the Bible says you're foolish. Ecclesiastes 7, verse 9: "For anger resteth in the bosom of fools." Number two: you have a weak character. Proverbs 16, verse 32: "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." If you cannot rule your own spirit, you're never going to conquer anything else, and you have a weak character, and when you have this kind of an anger, what you're doing is you're opening the door to the destruction of your home, because Proverbs 29, verse 22, says, "An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression." Uncontrolled anger is

like throwing a rock into a wasp nest. God's Word says, "Be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger."

Now, let me just bring all this to conclusion the few minutes I have left. Suppose you and your wife now are having an argument, a difference. What can you do? What should you do? Well, let me tell you what not to do. Don't run out. Don't run out. Don't just try to escape and get away, and think, "Well, it'll be better later on." Now, there may be a time when you need to quiet down. There may be a time when you need to just get apart until your temperature rises. You're cooled down. I mean, you can control it. Have you ever noticed that you and your wife can be in a deep, heated argument, and you're so full of venom, and then the phone rings. You say, "Hello?" So don't tell me you can't control it. But don't run out. Don't run out, because when you stuff it, when you run away from an argument, what you are doing is, it's like putting smoldering rags in a closet. It will come out sooner or later. The Bible says, "Don't let the sun go down upon your wrath." Get it settled, and get it settled today. If there's a piece of paper on the carpet, and you pick it up the first time you see it, let me tell you this, the carpet stays clean; but if you allow these things to build up, before long, the entire carpet is dirty. You have to pick them up one at a time, and deal with these things. Do not run out. Okay?

Number two—listen, folks: don't give in. Don't practice avoidance. Don't practice appeasement. Don't give in. If your mate is doing something wrong, and you're the one that always gives in, before long, you are going to learn to resent your mate, and there will be, if not an open divorce, there will be an emotional divorce—if you're the one who always gives in. Compromise, yes; appeasement, no.

Don't run out. Don't give in. Don't fire up. Don't get into a head-to-head argument. The next verse in our text says, "The wrath of man works not the righteousness of God." You get into a verbal argument, both of you are going to lose.

What should you do? Listen, folks, very quickly. Find the right time, not before mealtime. Ninety percent of all arguments start just before mealtime—did you know that? Your blood sugar's down. Find the right time. Find the right tone. Tone down. O God, help me to control my mouth. Pray over it. The right time, the right tone, the right turf. What do I mean by the right turf? The right place. Get out of the house, perhaps. Go sit down in a quiet place. Go for a drive where you can talk in a reasonable way. Have you ever noticed that sometimes people will say things when best friends are present? Do you know why they do that? It's a cheap shot. They say, "Well, Adrian said so and so," or, "George did so and so," or Bill or Susie, or whatever. When friends are present, that's a cheap shot, because they're afraid to say that in private, so they say it when friends are around. The right time, the right tone, the right turf.

And what do you do? What do you do? Well, number one, just make up your mind to

accept the other person. Folks, nobody is perfect, not even you! Not even you. The only perfect people I can think of are Joyce and Adrian, and I'm not sure about Joyce. We have to accept the other person. I have to accept Joyce; I cannot change her. She has to accept me. Getting married is like buying a phonograph record. You buy it because you want what's on one side. You just take what's on the other side. Practice, dear friend, acceptance.

And then, practice accommodation. Accommodate yourself to the other individual. Fit in with their plans. It's worth it.

And practice adjustment. Adjust. Both of you get in. Rather than having a war where both lose, have a compromise where both gain. Joyce and I are learning to do this. By the way, folks, let me tell you something—testimony time. It hasn't gotten any easier all these years we've been married. If anything, it's gotten more complicated. You know, she married a dumb football player; she's now married to the pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church. I married a beautiful, simple little girl, and now I'm married to a complicated, beautiful woman. It doesn't get any easier. It doesn't; but it gets sweeter every day. I wouldn't take anything for our Christian home.

Conclusion

Tune in, tone down, lighten up, and let God give you intimacy in marriage.

Bow your heads in prayer. Heads are bowed. Eyes are closed. Do you know Jesus? Now, you can't have a Christian home without Christians. You say, "Well, I'm not married." You still need Jesus. You say, "My home is broken." You need Jesus all the more. You say, "I'm not yet married." You need Jesus to guide you. Are you saved? You say, "Well, my mate is in heaven." Well then, you need Jesus to meet him there, to meet her there. Are you saved? If you'd like to invite Jesus Christ into your heart, I'm going to help you to do that right now. Right now, where you are, I want to tell you the Bible says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." That doesn't mean to believe about Him; it means to trust Him. You can believe an airplane can fly, but you don't trust it till you get on it. To trust the Lord Jesus—are you willing to trust Him right now? Don't look for a feeling. Don't ask for some sign. You have the Word of God, and you have the promise of God that, if you'll trust Him, He'll save you. If you'd like to be saved and become a child of God, if you're sick and tired of your sin, want a new life and want a home in heaven, I want you to pray this kind of a prayer right now. Right now, silently, but fervently, I invite you to pray like this. Pray it out of your heart: "Dear God." Right now, from your heart, pray: "Dear God, I'm a sinner. I need to be saved. My sin deserves judgment, but I need and want mercy. Lord, I know that You love me. I know that You want to save me. Jesus, You died to save me. You paid for my sin with

Your blood on the cross. God raised You from the dead. You're the Son of God. I now receive You by faith as my Saviour and Lord. Forgive my sin. Take control of my life, right now. Begin now, this moment, to make me the person You want me to be. I receive You, right now, by faith, as my Lord and Saviour." Now, pray this: "Thank You for saving me." Just pray it by faith. If you were sincere, pray it by faith. "Thank You for saving me. I don't look for a sign. I don't ask for a feeling. I stand on Your Word. Thank You for saving me." Now, pray this: "Lord Jesus, because You died for me, I will live for You, and I will follow You the rest of my life, by Your grace and for Your glory, and, Lord Jesus..."—pray this now—"...Lord Jesus, give me the courage to make it public, not to be ashamed of You. In Your name I pray. Amen."

Communication in the Home

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: January 12, 2003

Main Scripture Text: James 1:19–20

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”

JAMES 1:19

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Conclusion

Introduction

Thank you for the music tonight, choir, Jim, singers. It was wonderful. Now, find James chapter 1. When you have found it, look up here. Joyce asked me on the way to church tonight, “Adrian, what is your subject matter?” And I said, “I am going to be speaking tonight on communication between husbands and wives.” She said, “Well, all right, but

remember I will be sitting out there listening to every word.” I think, perhaps the number one problem in most of our homes is in communication. As a matter of fact, one marriage counselor said 80%—80%—of those who come in for counseling about marriage have a problem that roots in poor communication.

Well, James is talking about communication here in James chapter 1, verses 19 and 20—let’s look at it: “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” There is awesome power in communication, the power of the tongue. As a matter of fact, if we don’t in our marriages learn to communicate, most likely our marriage will disintegrate.

Let me give you a few ancillary verses even before we even get to our main text. Proverbs chapter 18, verse 21: “Life and death are in the power of the tongue.” Now, folks, that is powerful. “Life and death are in the power of the tongue: and they that love life shall eat the fruit thereof.” That is, if you want a happy life, you are going to have the fruit of a good conversation to nourish that life.

And then again, to husbands and wives, over in 1 Peter chapter 3, verse 10: “For he that will love life, and see good days...”—now, who doesn’t want to see good days?—“For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile.”

Now, sometimes it is hard for husbands and wives to communicate, because men and women are different. They were sitting on the front porch on the swing. It was a wonderful night. They were in love, and there across the valley, through the vale, was the little country church with the yellow light streaming out through the window. And the choir was practicing, and the strains of the choir practice were echoing through the valley. And she was beautiful; he was handsome. They were very much in love. Beneath the porch were the crickets chirping. He, thinking about fishing, was listening to the crickets. She, romantically, was listening to the music. And she said to him, “Isn’t that the most beautiful thing you have ever heard?” He said, “It is.” Said, “They tell me they make that noise by rubbing their hind legs together.” That is the difference between a man and woman. And sometimes we are not on the same page at all.

A. The Frivolous Level

How do we communicate? Well, number one: there is the frivolous level. That’s where we talk about the weather, we are talking about sports, we are talking about clothes, maybe just nonsense. Somebody said, people are frequently overheard saying nothing.

B. The Factual Level

And then, there is the factual level. We move it up a little bit different, and we talk about facts without our personal involvement. And we talk about facts very much like people

talk about the evening news. And that is the way we may talk to a person on a bus, or standing on a corner somewhere.

C. The Fellowship Level

And then, there is the fellowship level, where we go a little deeper, and we go beyond facts, and we begin to talk about ideas, and judgments, and philosophies, and so forth. Now, when we get to this level, we know that we are risking, because we are putting our ideas out. The thing has become personal, and we know we may be contradicted, or we may be judged by what we say.

D. The Feeling Level

And then, there is a deeper level. We go to the feeling level. We talk about how we feel about these facts, and these ideas, and philosophies, and judgments. And we kind of open up our heart, and let somebody look into our heart.

E. The Freedom Level

And then there is the freedom level. That is the deepest level where we tell the other person everything. We don't hold back anything—our hurts, our wounds, our dreads, our fears, our ideas—completely, openly. That is the word, intimate. It comes from the Latin word *intimus*, which means inward. Very few people ever get to that level, even husbands and wives.

And so, I want to talk about conversation, and how to handle arguments, and how to achieve intimacy in marriage. And I think we can find it right here in what James said. Let's look at the verse again—verse 19: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

It may surprise you to learn that husbands and wives have conflicts in the best of marriages. Adrian, do you and Joyce ever have any conflicts? Is the Pope Catholic? We do. And they have never ever ceased. From the time we got married to this time, we have had some wonderful, wonderful discussions.

Now, is it wrong to debate with your mate? Let me read what a wonderful man said—a marriage counselor and a Ph.D.—Dr. Neal Clark Warren. Here is what he said: "I know a couple who fight like cats and dogs." By the way, Joyce and I don't fight like cats and dogs. "I know a couple who fight like cats and dogs, but they are wildly in love with one another." Joyce and I are wildly in love with one another. But now let's get back to what Dr. Warren said: "I know a couple who fight like cats and dogs, but they are wildly in love with each other. What's more, I think they have one of the healthiest marriages I know. Does that shock you?" This counselor says they fight like cats and dogs, yet they have one of the healthiest marriages I know. And he says, "Does that shock you? If it does, get ready for some bigger surprises. My thirty years as a

psychologist have slowly taught me a difficult-to-believe fact. The amount of conflict in a marriage only determines the speed at which the marriage is moving toward greatness or toward disintegration. If you want to sit still in your marriage, rule out all conflict. If you want your marriage to crash and burn, let conflict rage, but refuse to learn the skills necessary for managing it. Well, managed conflict is like a stairway that can lead you to higher and higher levels of marital greatness.”

Now, that is a statement from a man quoted in materials from Focus on the Family. And, as I analyze that, what he is saying is, if you have conflict, the great issue is not whether or not you have conflict, but how you handle that conflict. If you learn to handle that conflict wisely, and in a healthy way, your marriage will grow. If you don't, it will disintegrate.

Now, James says three things in this passage of Scripture, and they are absolutely fundamental. He says, be quick to listen, be slow to speak, and slow to wrath. Now, let's just look at those. How many husbands and wives are here tonight? Let me see your hands. All right, that is most of us, so I want you to listen. The rest of you have been married, and perhaps you are widowed or divorced, others anticipating marriage. And so, let's listen very carefully.

First of all, he says in this passage of Scripture, we are to be quick to listen. Why do you think God gave us two ears and only one mouth? When we listen well to our spouse, we are well on the road of good communication. As a matter of fact, Joyce and I, on the way over, began to talk about communication, when she knew what I was going to speak on. I said, “Now, be careful what you say, for anything you say may be used as a sermon illustration.” Joyce said, “Well, you need to listen more.” And that is what James says. James says, “Be swift to hear.” When we listen, we encourage our mate to talk. And when we know that somebody is listening to us, really listening, it is a great encouragement. Now, “let the wise listen,” the book of Proverbs says, “and add to their understanding.”

Now, if you don't listen, if you refuse to listen, there is going to be a great barrier in your marriage. Why do we refuse to listen? A little three-letter word: it is called—e-g-o—ego. It is ego that keeps us from listening to the other person. That ego may show itself in defensiveness. We don't want to hear what the other person has to say, and so we tune them out to keep from hearing. Or it may just be assumption. We think we know what they are going to say. We have heard it before. And so, we just assume that we know the answer. And while they are speaking, we are already preparing a response. Joyce frequently chides me for finishing her sentences, getting out ahead, coming to a sentence before she is finished—like assuming I know what she is going to say or what her response is supposed to be.

I. Concentration

So let me give you some things I have learned through my study, and painfully through life, about how to listen. Number one: concentration, very hard for a man to do—very hard for Adrian to do. Concentration. Listen with your eyes. Look at the other person who is speaking. And, if you look with your eyes, number one: they are going to assume that you are listening. And, number two: you are going to learn something about them, if you listen, not with your ears only, but with your eyes. You watch their body language. Watch their facial expressions. Look into their eyes, and look for anger, or look for joy, or look for confusion, or look for tears, or look for excitement. People communicate with more than words. When you give your full attention like that, and you concentrate, they feel that you are interested in them. And, if you are interested in them, perhaps you love them. Lean forward, nod; make motions to say that you are listening. Let your face say, tell me more, tell me about this. That will encourage your spouse to listen. Don't pretend to listen. One man said, "I am concerned about my wife. She goes around the house talking to herself all the time." "Well, does she know she is doing it?" "No, she thinks I am listening to her."

Don't selectively listen. In the reading I did, it said that 20% is all we really get. We tune in and then tune out, and we come back in to listen to what they are saying, and then we tune back out. Listen with your eyes. Listen with your ears. Listen with your brain, Listen with your heart. Concentrate on your mate. Learn to listen by concentration. Let your mate say, "He or she has 100% of my attention right now or they are giving me 100% of their attention.

I also read that most marriages would be far better if the partner were given—listen to this—at least fifteen minutes of concentrated attention a day. Just fifteen minutes, we don't even get that. First of all, concentration. Got it? Say concentration. All right, so you are listening.

II. Consideration

Now, next, not only concentration, but consideration. A part of good listening is not only to hear, but to consider what you have said to us, what has been said, to assess what the other person says, to think about it, to think about it, to turn it over. Assess their words; listen to their words. What did they really say? Are you hearing their words? But not only listen to the words—listen to the meaning of their words. Now, what I mean by that is, what do you think they mean? Sometimes they will say one thing and really mean another. Joyce will do that sometimes. She will say, "Don't listen to what I say; listen to what I mean." That is the reason you have to pray a lot when you listen. Sometimes words get twisted. Sometimes phrases don't come out right. So don't jump to conclusions. Once there was a dog named August who was always jumping to

conclusions. One day he jumped to the conclusion of a mule. That was the last day of August.

Try to listen, not only to words, but to the meaning. And then also, listen not only to words and meaning, but feelings. How do they look? What are they feeling? The emotions have a lot to do with communication. And sometimes when a person is angry or hurt, they are going to say things they don't really mean.

III. Clarification

So there is concentration, consideration, and then clarification—clarification. You know if we were not human, we wouldn't need to clarify things so often. But in any conversation, there is what we say and what we thought we said. And there is what we hear and we thought we heard. There is big gap in all of that. And so, we have to clarify it. Sometimes when Joyce and I are in a discussion, I will say, now, tell me what you think I said. And she will say something completely different than I meant. Now, whether the problem was in my mouth or her ear is academic. But we need to clarify what we have said, so the other person really understands.

And sometimes we are to stop and say, can you repeat what you think I said so we can get it clear. Now, what James says is we need to learn to listen. We need to tune in. I confess before you that I am a better talker than listener. We need to listen. But not only do we need to be swift to hear; we need to be slow to speak. That is what James says. Now, our mouths are going to get us in trouble, if we are not careful.

Let me give you some more Proverbs before we come back to James. Proverbs 10, verse 19: "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise." That is a good one to put on the refrigerator. Let me read it again: "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin." That is, if you keep talking long enough, you are going to make a big mistake if you just let your words run on. "But he that refraineth his lips is wise." Here is another one—Proverbs 17, verse 27: "He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit." Here is another one—Proverbs 21:23: "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue, keepeth his soul from troubles." Great stuff here. Ecclesiastes 5 and verse 3: "For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by the multitude of words"—a fool's voice. Somebody said that speech is silver; silence is golden. The old rabbis used to say that we have two ears given to us, and one tongue. Our ears are open and exposed, our tongue is walled and behind our teeth. And they drew this conclusion: that we ought to listen twice as much as speak.

IV. Communication Killers

Now, let me tell you some mistakes that we make in our speech. And these are roles

that we play. Assume that we are to play these roles sometimes, and these are communication killers. And see if you find yourself or your mate playing one of these roles.

A. Playing the Judge

Sometimes people play the judge. And, by the way, I want to use 1 Corinthians 13 as an example of love, and compare it to what we do that is antithetical to love. For example, the Bible says, in 1 Corinthians 13, that love is kind. But sometimes we want to play jury, judge, and executioner—if you are the one in an argument who lays out the blame, and then condemns the other person. We, as a judge, assume false and wrong information. If you do these, these are great communication killers. We use words like “you always.” Have you ever started a sentence with your mate that way—“You always,” or “you never”? It would be far better for you to say, “I feel,” or “I need,” or “it seems to me.” Have you ever said, “I told you so?” “You are just like your father.” “You are just like your mother.” “You are always in a bad mood.” “You just don’t think.” “It is your fault.” “What’s wrong with you?” “All you ever do is complain.” “I can’t do anything to please you.” “You are getting what you deserve.” “Why don’t you ever listen to me?” “Why can’t you be more responsible?” “What were you thinking?” “You are impossible.” “I don’t know why I put up with you.” “If you don’t like it, you can just leave.” “That was stupid.” “All you ever do is think of yourself.” “You are such a baby.” “You deserve a dose of your own medicine.” “Do you always have to be right?” Those are phrases that the judge will use. Don’t do it.

B. Playing the Professor

Now, maybe you won’t play the judge. Maybe you will play the professor. Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 13, “that love vaunteth not itself.” The professor acts superior. The professor talks down to the other person, and his conversation is filled with constant put-downs. “That is stupid.” “If you had an ounce of brains, you would know that that is stupid.” “You couldn’t understand if I told you—you are a woman.” Well, listen. You know what women do? They don’t even put it in a sentence. They have just got one word, men. Every woman knows what that means. One word: men. Putting the other person down. One man said to his wife, “How could you be so dumb and so beautiful at the same time?” She said, “God made me beautiful so you would be attracted to me, and made me dumb so I would be attracted to you.” When you play the professor, and you put somebody else down, you are attacking their self-worth. And I can give it to you almost totally with full assurance, that when you attack somebody else’s self-worth, you are headed for trouble, you are headed for an argument.

C. Playing the Psychologist

Now, maybe you don’t play the judge. Maybe you don’t play the professor. Maybe you

play the psychologist. And the Bible says, love is not puffed up. The psychologist is always figuring out why the other person does what they do. They analyze the other individual. Let me tell you why you said. Let me tell you why you did that. Do you know why you think that way? And we try to get into the other person's heart, and analyze their motives and their thoughts, when the Bible clearly forbids it and tells us not to judge one another. Only God can do that. Don't be the psychologist with your wife or with your husband.

D. Playing the Historian

Or maybe we play the historian. The Bible says, love thinketh no evil. That means that it doesn't keep score. Sometimes you will be in the middle of a real discussion, and as a diversionary smokescreen, the person you are talking with will leave that subject and go back to something that happened yesterday, or last month, or ten years ago, or fifteen years ago. One man said, "My wife gets historical." He said, "You mean hysterical?" He said, "No, historical. She goes back and digs up all of these other things, and it becomes a rerun of old arguments." Don't do that. Close the door on yesterday. There is so much bad stuff in yesterday, folks. Don't go back and dig it up. Don't play the historian.

E. Playing the Dictator

I will tell you what else some people do. We're talking about how to learn to speak. Don't play the dictator. There are a lot of bullies around. The Bible says, love seeketh not her own. A person who wants to show force in his communication is a poor communicator. Have you ever heard a person say, "I will not allow this," "I demand that you do this or that," "If you do that one more time, you are going to be sorry," "Try that once more and see what happens"? And you begin to demand and coerce. Someone has said, "The honeymoon is that period of time between I do and you'd better." Playing the dictator.

How do we coerce other people in communication? There may be physical force. There may be, if you are a man, laying your hand on your wife's shoulders and pinning her to the wall, or taking her by the arm and squeezing her arm. If you do that, you are a bully and a coward. You ought to be tied to a wagon wheel and whipped. Don't ever lay a physical hand on your wife.

Then, there is the wife who plays the neurotic invalid, always moaning and groaning and looking for sympathy. I am not talking about a true invalid. I am not talking about a person who has true physical disabilities. There are those who play dictator by withholding money. Some of you men have the idea that it is your money because you bring home the paycheck. I wouldn't trade places with my wife for the work she does for the work I do. It is our money—not your money, not her money. Sometimes sex and

affection is withheld. Sometimes we dictate by sulking and pouting. A dictator is a cruel person. And a person who is dictatorial is going to frustrate his or her mate. What the dictator says is, “I can do a better job with your life that you can, and when I want your opinion, I will give it to you.” Don’t be the dictator.

F. Playing the Critic

And don’t play the critic. Love does not behave itself unseemly. Never compare your mate to any other individual. Never say, “Why aren’t you like thus-and-such a person?” “Why aren’t you like John?” “Why aren’t you like Mary?” Or, “why are you just like your father, just like your brother, just like your mother?” And, above all, never criticize your mate for something your mate has no control over. I mean, don’t criticize them about parents, or their upbringing, or physical traits—things they cannot control.

G. Playing the Preacher

And don’t play the preacher. Don’t go home and preach this message to your mate. Love rejoiceth not in iniquity. Never use the Bible as a club to beat your husband or your wife over the head with. Never appear holier than thou. Ruth Graham said, concerning their marriage, “It is your job to love your husband; it is God’s job to make him good.”

V. Conflict Resolution

Now, be swift to hear, be slow to speak; and then, last of all, be slow to wrath. I read this in the Amplified Version, and this is the way it gives it: “Be slow to take offense and to get angry—slow to take offense and to get angry.” Now, there is such a thing as righteous anger. He doesn’t say, don’t get angry; he says, be slow to wrath. What is righteous anger? The Bible says Jesus was moved with anger. Be angry for the right reason. What made Jesus angry? It was the hard hearts of human beings in the face of human hurts. Be angry for the right reasons. Be angry at the right things. You may be angry at the wrong done without being angry at the wrongdoer. We should hate sin and not the sinners. Jesus hated sin, but He was a friend of sinners.

And then, be angry in the right way. Your anger ought to make you a part of the solution. The wrath of man works not the righteousness of God. Righteous anger moves us to righteous action. An uncontrolled temper is a terrible thing. One of the ways that I know the grace of God is in my life is that God is helping me to control what was an ungovernable temper, even as a boy before I got saved. What does a bad temper show about you? Some people are proud of their quick temper. I will tell you what the Bible says about temper, when a person is not slow to wrath. Let me give you some Scripture—Ecclesiastes 7:9: “Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.” I didn’t call you a fool. God did, if you are one of these people who fly off the handle. Listen to it: “Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in

the bosom of fools.” It shows a foolish mind. It shows a weak character. Proverbs 16, verse 32: “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.” Anger opens the door to all other kinds of sins. Proverbs 29, verse 22: “An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression.” Anger is like a stone thrown in a hornet’s nest. This kind of anger will destroy your testimony before your children, before your wife, and in the neighborhood.

A. Don’t Avoid

Well, how are you going to handle this kind of anger? When James says, be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, slow to wrath—how do you handle it? Well, husbands and wives, listen to your pastor. You don’t handle anger by avoidance and by running away. Remember what we said in the introduction to this message—what the marriage counselor and the psychologist said? We need to learn how to deal with conflicts.

Has this ever happened in your home? You said to your wife, “What is wrong with you?” She says, “Nothing.” Now, you are in big trouble. “Nothing.” Now, friend, nothing is further from the truth than that, when she says, “nothing.” It means everything is wrong, when she says nothing is wrong. No, sometimes people have the idea, if I just retreat and back away, it will go away. Sometimes we don’t want to confront our mate because of what we are going to learn about ourselves. But you cannot practice avoidance. It is not going to go away. You drive it down deeper into the subconscious, and, if nothing else, your stomach is going to keep the score. You kick it out the front door, and it will run around the house and come in the basement window, and show up as an ulcer, or show up as the inability to sleep, or digest, or a pain in the neck, or whatever.

B. Don’t Appease

Don’t avoid it—not avoidance, and not appeasement. I believe I see more appeasement with godly women, and I am sorry that I do. Appeasement is giving in, letting the other person always have his way, letting the other mate run over you and dominate. Sometimes we men appease. Joyce and I want to have a vacation. I want to go to the seashore; she wants to go to the mountains. And so we compromise and go to the mountains. One man said, “I lied on my tax returns; I signed the thing as the head of the house.” When you appease, what you do is to internalize. If he gets violent, and you get silent, then it is going to go down. And, like rags, it is going to smolder—like rags, oily rags in a closet. And then, one day, somebody is going to open the door and it is all just going to burst into flames. And you are going to say, “What went wrong?” Somebody who has been constantly appeasing until, finally, they can take no more. Not avoidance, not appeasement. Compromise, yes; appeasement, no.

C. **Don't Be Aggressive**

Now, let's see another thing that you do. You don't run away; you don't appease; and you don't practice aggression. When you get angry, don't flare up. Speak the truth, but speak the truth in love. And sarcasm is never in order. If sarcasm were a spiritual gift, I would have the gift of sarcasm. I mean, I can think of a lot of things to say that I ought not to say. You see, we need to learn to attack the problem and not one another. There are no problems too big to solve, just people too small to solve them. And so, don't practice aggression.

Let me tell you how to handle this thing. Number one: if you are having a genuine conflict, choose the right time to talk about it. And don't talk about it just before mealtime when your blood sugar is down. In the reading that I did preparing for this message, I found out that 90% of arguments, according to counselors, take place just before meals. It is interesting, 90%. Or, secondarily, on the way to a social event. Did you and your wife—don't lift your hand—ever get into an argument on the way to a party, on the way to a social event? Make sure that you have the right time. Make sure that you have the right tone. The Bible says that a soft answer turns away wrath. Again, one of my problems—you need to know what you have got for a pastor: I have to watch that I don't use my voice; I have just a big voice anyway. Sometimes I can sound gruff, when I am not really gruff. Somebody said, keep your words warm and soft; you might have to eat them. The right time, the right tone; and this is very important: the right turf. What I mean by that is, don't ever assassinate or correct your mate in public. You know why we do this sometimes? Because we are afraid to do it in private. So we wait until there are a lot of people around, so they can't really retaliate, or we can get some people on our side, we hope. Really, that is a cheap shot when you do that. Don't do that.

D. **Practice Accommodation**

Now, here are some things you can do. I am almost finished now. We are talking now about being slow to wrath. We said not appeasement, not avoidance, not aggression. What do you do? The right time, the right tone, the right turf—and here is what you do. Number one: learn to accommodate. Say to yourself, "I will change." Accommodate your mate. For example, if you don't have enough time together, learn to do what he wants to do. Or learn to do what she wants to do. Learn to do some things together. Why not learn her sport? Why not learn his hobby? Practice accommodation. Practice acceptance. Accept the fact that there are some things about your mate that are not going to change. A wise person said, "Getting married is like buying an old-fashioned phonograph record. You buy it because you want what is on one side, and you just accept what comes on the other side."

People are different. And they may change. Love them, and they may change. But accept them, if they never change. Never marry a person with the idea that you are

going to change them. Joyce and I are so different it is incredible. On these personality charts, things I am high on she is low on. Things I am low on, she is high on. And you put them on a graph, and they make a perfect X. And yet, we are desperately in love. We have a wonderfully happy marriage. I would put our marriage up against any marriage in the world, but we are so different.

The Rogers family was so different than the Gentry family. She was a Gentry. And, in my family, when you sat around the dinner table, I mean it was zinging back and forth with a quip, and a repartee, and a story, and always it was back and forth like this around the dinner table. That was just normal.

In the Gentry family, they never did that. Everything was a kind, sweet remark. And, if anybody were going to tell a joke, they would lead up this way: "I have a joke I want to tell." Who ever tells a joke that way? Just so different. Learn to accept.

E. Practice Adjustment

All right now, look. Practice accommodation, and then practice adjustment. You can both change. I like to stay up late. Joyce likes to get up early. Every morning for me is a resurrection. Now, I have to get up. Don't get the idea that I just lie around in the bed. I don't. Don't say the preacher sleeps all day. I don't. But I tell you, it is a job to get the bed off my back. Joyce is up—"La, la, la, la, la." I go in the bathroom and have to put my knee on the toothpaste to squeeze it. Just a difference—God made us different that He might make us one. We need to learn to adjust, and, rather than having a war where both parties lose, have a compromise where both gain. Now, I didn't say appeasement; I said compromise. Sometimes we watch football, but not all of the time. Sometimes we go to bed early; sometimes we get to stay up late. Sometimes we eat Mexican, but not always.

Conclusion

Learn to live together as heirs of the grace of life. Be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. Deeply spiritual, intensely practical.

Bow your heads in prayer. Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. "Lord, I just pray that You will help us, as husband and wife, to listen to one another, to listen with our hearts and our minds, and our eyes as well as our ears. Lord, let the law of kindness be in our mouths. Help us, Lord, not to be judgmental, and to put other people down, or to criticize, or to assign blame. And, Lord, help us to control our tempers, and, Lord, to keep our spirits in subjection to your Holy Spirit. In the strong name of Jesus. Amen.

Tune In, Tone Down, and Sweeten Up

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: July 9, 1978

Main Scripture Text: James 1:19–20

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”

JAMES 1:19

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Introduction

Take your Bibles now, and turn to James chapter 1—the Book of James. Now, you may know, and you should know, that we're preaching through the Book of James Sunday morning and Sunday evenings. And so, tonight we're going to be talking about welcoming the Word—how to receive the Word of God—how to read the Bible and get something out of it for your life. And, it'll be very important that you be here tonight.

But, this morning I want us to look in James chapter 1, verses 19 and 20—James 1, verses 19 and 20: *“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God”* (James 1:19–20). I want to speak to you today on this subject: “Tune In, Tone Down, and Sweeten Up.” This is God’s plan for born-again Christians.

Now, I read verses 19 and 20, but verse 18 speaks of the new birth: *“Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures”*

(James 1:18). And, verse 18 speaks of the wonderful new birth that I have experienced, and every true Christian has experienced, and I trust that you have experienced. We're hearing a lot today about the new birth. And, a lot of people are talking about being born again, however, who have not been born again. And, one of the ways that you can tell they have not been born again is there's been no change whatsoever in the way they live.

Now, let me tell you something, friend: if you've had a new birth, there's going to be some new behavior. Just write it down: *"If any man be in Christ [Jesus], he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new"* (2 Corinthians 5:17). And, *if your religion hasn't changed your life, you'd better change your religion, because you don't have the Bible kind.*

And so, in verse 18, James speaks of the new birth. And then, beginning in verse 19, he speaks of the new behavior.

Some men were standing around talking about different translations of the Bible, and some were talking about the Revised Standard Version, others talking about the King James Version, others talking about the New English Bible, others were talking about the Amplified Version. One man said, "I like my mother's translation best." And, they said, "Oh, we didn't know that your mother was a scholar. How did she translate the Bible?" And, he said, "My mother translated the Bible into daily living." Amen? That's the translation I think we all need—to translate what we know into life.

And so, James talks about three very pertinent areas of our behavior. And, I want you to notice these three areas of instruction that James gives to us, because we have been born again. Look again in verse 19: *"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear,"*—that is, "tune in"—*"slow to speak,"*—that is, "tone down," and—*"slow to wrath"* (James 1:19)—that is, "sweeten up."

I. Tune in to What God Is Saying

Now, let's notice the first of these: *"Be swift to hear"*; tune in to what God is saying to you. Some people don't have their ears on. They have ears, but they don't hear. Jesus spoke of those who had ears, but they hear not (Mark 8:18).

Now, the Bible says we are to *"be swift to hear"*—that is, be ready to receive the things that God has for us. Now, the Bible doesn't teach that we're to hear everything there is to hear. There are some things we ought not to hear. Mark chapter 1 and verse 24 says, *"Take heed what ye hear"* (Mark 4:24). And, you don't need to be listening to everything that comes along. You don't have to listen to every scrap of gossip, let people use your ears for garbage cans. You don't have to listen to every philosophy that comes along in all of these things. No, no, no, no. Jesus said, "Be careful what you hear."

But, James says, *“Be swift to hear”* (James 1:19). And, what is James talking about? He is saying be swift to hear the impulses of the Spirit. Be swift to hear the Word of God. Hear what God is speaking to you. Are you ready to listen to God this morning? The problem with so many of us is that we’re not listening. It is not that God is not speaking. God is speaking. But, our problem is that we don’t listen.

A. God Speaks Through the Bible

I want to mention three ways this morning that God wants to speak to you. One way that God speaks is through the Scriptures, through the Bible. Do you know this book? Do you read this book? Do you study this book? Do you pray over this book? Do you love this book? If not, why not? You claim to be a Christian. This is God’s Word to you. You’re saying, “O God, speak to me.” Well, God will speak to you, if you will open this book and pray over it, and read it, and say, “O Lord, incline mine ear to Thy testimonies.” This Bible is the Word of God as much as though Jesus Christ Himself were standing here in the flesh speaking to you. This book is the Word of God. Do you know it? Do you hear it? Do you receive it? So many people read the Bible, and they get nothing from it, because they’re not listening what God is saying.

Let me give you five little things to put down in the flyleaf of your Bible, or somewhere, to help you when you study a passage of Scripture—five little questions to ask yourself—very simple. Number one is—you read any passage of Scripture—ask yourself this question: Is there a lesson to learn? As you read it—you read a chapter or a few verses—you say, “Is there a lesson to learn?” Number two, ask yourself this question: Is there a blessing to enjoy? Oh, dear friend, this book is full of blessings. And, you can just sit back and roll them around on your tongue, and meditate in your heart, and enjoy those blessings. Number three: Is there a command to obey? Number four: Is there a sin to avoid? Number five: Is there a new truth to carry with me? And, just as you read—as you read a passage of Scripture, keep asking yourself those questions over and over again, so that the Word of God will get off of the page and into your heart.

B. God Speaks Through the Sermon

One way that God will speak to you is through the Scripture. Another way that God will speak to you is through the sermon—through the sermon. You see, God calls his preachers to preach. The Bible says, *“How shall they hear without a preacher?”* (Romans 10:14). And, I’m not being vain or egotistical when I tell you that I know that God has empowered me to preach. If not, I would have no business being here. And, I can say with the prophet Isaiah, *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, [for] the LORD hath anointed me to preach”* (Isaiah 61:1).

And, God holds me responsible for what I preach. And, the Bible tells us to be very

careful the way we preach: *“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God”* (1 Peter 4:11). And, it is incumbent upon me that I be prayerfully prepared to come and stand in this sacred place. But, it is also just as incumbent upon you, when you come to church on Sunday morning, that you be prepared to listen. And, I have as much right to expect you to be prepared, as you have to expect me to be prepared. Amen?

You know, sometimes people can sit in church and look straight at the preacher, with eyes wide open, and figure up a business deal, or what they’re going to have for Sunday dinner, or what they’re going to wear this evening, or who’s going to win the tennis match; and, they can be figuring those things, and looking straight at you as though they’re paying attention. And, sometimes, they don’t even look at you. They close their eyes. You know, they call it meditation—meditation.

One man said to his pastor—trying to impress the pastor—he said, “Pastor, could you give me a little prayer that I might pray upon entering the sanctuary?” The pastor said, “May I suggest, ‘Now I lay me down to sleep.’”

Let me tell you something, friend. You will learn something this morning, if you’ll take a notebook, and take some notes, and take an open Bible, and use your Bible in this service. You will learn some things. You ought to carry some things away with you, when you come to church.

I’m not the best preacher in the world, and I’m well aware of that. I want to tell you something, though. *While there are others who may be able to preach the gospel better than I, no one can preach a better gospel than I, because there is but one.* And, as I’ve said before, God will hold you responsible for what you hear this morning. As a matter of fact, God will even hold you responsible for what you would have heard, had you listened.

C. God Speaks Through the Spirit

Now, God speaks through the Scriptures. And, God speaks through the sermon. And, God speaks through the Spirit—through the Spirit. Again, the Bible says, concerning the Holy Spirit, *“He that hath [ears] to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the [church]”* (Revelation 3:6). That’s another way that God speaks. And, may I tell you that it is easier to hear God speaking in the Bible, and it is easier to hear God speaking from the pulpit, than it is to hear God speaking with his Spirit to our spirit.

Many of us have not learned to get quiet and let God speak to us in those quiet times, those times of meditation. The devil aims his heaviest artillery at that quiet place where you get alone with the Lord. How many of you have a quiet time—a time where you get alone and not say, “Listen, Lord; thy servant speaketh,” but, *“Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth”* (1 Samuel 3:9)—to be quiet before the Lord.

The Bible says, *“In quietness and in confidence...”* (Isaiah 30:15), *“possess ye your*

souls” (Luke 21:19); “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). And, the reason that God doesn’t speak to some of us is that, when we come to that time when we’re to have fellowship with God, we do all of the talking.

Do you like to hold a conversation with someone who does all of the talking? Somebody said, “An egotist is somebody that talks himself so much that you can’t talk about yourself.” Many of us are egotists when we come to prayer, rather than listening to God and being quiet.

You know, that’s the reason many of us always want some noise going on. Have you ever noticed a teenager going down a road with a transistor radio held up to his ear? Now, they even make them like earmuffs—you’ve got one over each ear. So, go down the road always with this din, this racket, coming on. Some people, immediately, they come in the house, flick on the television. Someone’s got to have some noise, something going on. They cannot bear to be quiet and alone with God. No wonder God has such a problem breaking through and speaking to the spirit.

We just got back from Israel, and our guide was saying, “You see those shepherds out there on the field? Just like they used to be 2,000 years ago, but with one exception”; he said, “They used to carry a flute with them; now, they have a transistor radio”—I’m afraid, if David had a transistor radio, we might not have had the 23rd psalm.

“Be still, and know that I am the Lord.” Be ready to listen. Can God get your attention? Do you know what the word *amuse* means? It means, “not to think”—a meaning, “no”; *muse* meaning, “to think”—*amuse*. Most of us are amusing ourselves out of fellowship with God, because we do not allow God to speak to us, because we don’t want to stop and think. You see, we’re hearing so much that we can’t hear. We have ears, but we hear not.

All right, so James, number one, says that a part of our new behavior that issues out of our new birth is that we are to tune in—tune in—to God. “Be swift to hear.”

II. Tone Ourselves Down

But, number two, not only should we be swift to hear; we need to be slow to speak. Again, this is what James says in verse 19: “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak” (James 1:19). Not only do we need to tune in; we need to tone down. The plain, unvarnished truth is that most of us talk too much. Many things are opened by mistake, but none so frequently as the mouth. And, James says, “Don’t talk as much as you are accustomed to talking.”

Now, by this verse, verse 19, jot these verses in the margin, would you please. Proverbs chapter 10, verse 19: “In the multitude of words there [lacketh] not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise” (Proverbs 10:19)—“In the multitude of words there [lacketh] not sin.” The more you talk, the more mathematical probability there is that

you're going to sin with your lips. *"In the multitude of words there [lacketh] not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise."*

Then, jot this verse down—Proverbs chapter 21, verse 23: *"Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles"* (Proverbs 21:23). Do you want to stay out of trouble? Keep your mouth shut. That's what the Word of God says. Many of us talk ourselves into trouble. He that *"keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles."* Listen to Ecclesiastes chapter 5 and verse 3—and jot this reference down: *"For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words"* (Ecclesiastes 5:3). The more a person talks, the more he sometimes proclaims the foolishness of his heart. Somebody has well said that it's better to keep your mouth shut and be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt. A fool's voice is known by the multitude of his words. James says, *"Be slow to speak."* Speech may be silver, but often, silence is golden.

Now, the rabbis used to say that man has two ears and one mouth. The ears are made always to be open; the mouth is made where it can be closed; and, the tongue is enclosed in a den behind ivory bars, the teeth. And, what they meant by that is this: that we're supposed to be listening twice as much as we're to be speaking. But, most of us have gone just the other route.

Jesus warned against speaking idle words. I want you to listen to what Jesus Christ said in Matthew chapter 12 and verse 16—Jesus, speaking to the Pharisees, said: *"But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment"* (Matthew 12:36). Did you hear that? *"Every idle word that men shall speak, [they'll] give account thereof in the day of judgment."* This has frightened some people, because they've thought that they could not be talking, unless they're talking in a serious thing. And, they're afraid to have any kind of a conversation. They're afraid of any humor. They're afraid of any lightheartedness. They're afraid of any jesting. That's not what this is talking about. That's not what this is talking about. Jesus here is not talking against pleasant conversation, even humor. This word *idle* means *non-productive*—an idle word.

In this same Book of James, James says, in chapter 2 and verse 20: *"Faith without works is dead"* (James 2:20). And, that word *dead* is the same word in the Greek as the word *idle*. "Faith without works is idle." What does that mean? It is non-productive. It doesn't contribute anything. It is hurtful, rather than helpful. And, what Jesus is saying is that any word that you speak that doesn't build up, that doesn't edify, that doesn't help—but words that are non-productive words, words that are destructive words—you're going to have to give an account in the day of judgment. Certainly humor can be productive. It can refresh. It can relax. Sometimes it can instruct. And, Jesus, on occasions, used humor.

I'm sure, when Jesus spoke of those who "gagged at a gnat and swallowed a camel" (Matthew 23:24), that broke them up in the aisles. He was talking about how ridiculous some people are in their pretenses.

Someone asked Charles Haddon Spurgeon one time—one of the greatest preachers who ever lived—"Mr. Spurgeon, why do you use humor in your messages, sometimes?" Spurgeon, with his wit, said, "I tickle my oyster until he opens the shell, and then I stick the knife in."

Humor can be used to disarm and refresh, and it can be, sometimes, profitable. But, there's "jesting, which is not convenient" (Ephesians 5:4). And, God didn't call us to be a bunch of back-slapping, joke-cracking, sanctified morons, sometimes talking about holy things, with callous and profane hands. No, no. "Every idle word that a man speaks shall he give account thereof in the Day of Judgment." And, what Jesus was talking about when he said that—if you will read the Scripture here in this particular chapter of Matthew, the Pharisees had just accused Jesus Christ of casting out devils by the prince of devils, and it was then that Jesus gave this warning. Jesus was not warning against a wise word spoken playfully, but He was warning against a foolish word spoken seriously, when they made this accusation. And, He said, "This is an idle word, a non-productive word," and He warned them very seriously.

How much harm is done by foolish talking? How many homes are broken? How many innocent people are sent to prison? How many hearts are crushed? How many families are divided? How many churches are split? How many souls are lost because people have not learned to set a guard at their mouth? Watch the words of your mouth. One of the marks that a man has been born again is that his tongue is now controlled. You see, when we're talking, we can't be listening. And so, the same Bible that says, "Be ready to hear," says, "Be slow to speak."

You see, the two are mutually incompatible:

*A wise old owl lived in an oak
The more he saw the less he spoke
The less he spoke the more he heard.*

Why can't we all be like that wise old bird? (Author Unknown)

A wise owl indeed, because he learned to listen.

Most of us would be amazed, if we just knew how much we rattle on. Most of us would be amazed, if somebody were to follow us around with a tape recorder, and tape everything we say in entire day, and then reduce it to print, and make us read it back at the end of the day. And,

*If all that we say
In a single day,*

*With never a word left out,
Were printed each night
In clear black and white
T'would make [strange] reading no doubt.
And then just suppose
Ere one's eyes he could close
He must read the day's record through;
Then wouldn't one sigh,
And wouldn't he try
A great deal less talking to do?
And I more than half think
That many a kink
Would be smoothed in life's tangled thread
If one-half that we say
In a single day
Were just left forever unsaid. (Author Unknown)*

And, we need to pray the prayer in Psalm 141 and verse 3: “*Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips*” (Psalms 141:3). And, if you want to put it a little more succinctly—“*Look before you lip.*” “*Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.*”

III. Sweeten Ourselves Up

And so, what is James saying? That the marks of a new Christian are—a new man, a man who has been born again—well, there are many of them. But, among them is, he's going to be swift to hear. Number two: he's going to be slow to speak. And, number three: he is going to be slow to wrath. Not only is he going to tune in, and tone down; he's going to sweeten up. And, sweetening up will be the sum total of these other two things.

When a man starts listening more and talking less, it affects his temper, and he learns to control his heart, because, when his thought life is controlled, and his tongue is controlled, then his temper is controlled. Thoughts, tongue, temper—here it comes, right on down the pipe.

And so, James says, “*Be...slow to wrath*” (James 1:19). Now, the Amplified Version says, “Be slow to take offense and get angry.” Some of the boys and girls may not know what the word *wrath* means. But, it means, be slow to “lose your temper,” or, be slow to “get angry.” Now, you should never lose your temper. As a matter of fact, you don't lose it; what you probably do is find it.

But, you see, the Bible doesn't say, “Never be angry.” I want to make that crystal

clear. The Bible does not say, “Never have wrath; never be angry.” The Bible doesn’t say that. To the contrary, the Bible says, in Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 26: “*Be ye angry, and sin not*” (Ephesians 4:26). It is wrong when your anger becomes sin—and, it easily can.

Jesus got angry, and Jesus was without sin. Some people never think of Jesus Christ as ever getting angry. They think of Jesus Christ as some sort of a man who wasn’t truly a man at all. They think of him as though He’s some sort of a heavenly IBM machine with milk for blood. But, Jesus did get angry. Mark chapter 3 and verse 5—read this verse: “*And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other*” (Mark 3:5). Jesus did get angry, and what made Jesus Christ angry was hard hearts in the face of human hurts; and, it made Jesus Christ angry.

And, there's something wrong with you, if some things don't make you angry. But, oh, how you need to be careful, for the Bible says, “Be angry, and sin not.” And, James says, “*Be...slow to wrath.*” Because, it is so easy for you—so easy—to let the line disappear between righteous indignation and personal irritation.

A. Be Angry for the Right Reason

And, oh, we’re such creatures to rationalize. We call our vile tempers righteous indignation. Let me tell you how you can be *good and mad*—mad and good at the same time. All right, *good and mad*—*good and mad*. Make certain these three things are present. Number one: make certain that you’re angry for the right reason—the right reason. You see, most of us get angry, when our toes are stepped on, when our rights are taken away, when somebody offends us, and somebody gets our parking place, to be more specific. Then, we get angry, you see.

Now, you read the record through, and while the Bible speaks of Jesus being moved with anger, you will never find one angry word spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ at any time when He was personally mistreated; not an angry word when they nailed Him to the cross. But, rather, He prayed, “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*” (Luke 23:34). Most of our anger is when somebody has wronged us. Jesus got angry when somebody else was being hurt. You make certain that, if you have anger, it’s righteous anger, and that it is for the right reason.

B. Be Angry at the Right Thing

Number two: that you’re angry at the right thing—at the right thing. Now, Jesus did not get angry with individuals. He got angry with institutions, and forms, and sins, but not with individuals. He loved the individual. You see, dear friend, you can be angry with the wrong done, but not with the wrongdoer. Most of us get angry at the wrongdoer. We

get angry at people. Jesus did not. Jesus loved people. And, while Jesus was moved with anger and hard hearts, and while Jesus burned, sometimes, with the zeal of his Father's house (John 2:17), yet the Lord Jesus was kind, and compassionate, and tender. And, though they were sinners, Jesus was the friend of sinners (Matthew 11:19).

And, I want to say something to you preacher boys here. I hope that all of your ministry you'll preach against liquor, with every ounce, and every inch, and every nerve, and every fiber. But, if you can't do it and love the bartender, you'd better keep your mouth shut. You preach against pornography, but you learn to love the pornographer. You can preach against homosexuality, but you'd better love the homosexual. "Be angry, and sin not." Not against persons.

Jesus Christ became angry, but His anger was for the right reasons—at the right things. And then, His anger, dear friend, was in the right way. He let His anger make Him a part of the solution, not a greater part of the problem. And, dear friend, when you lose your temper, you're not a part of the solution; you're part of the problem. And, "*The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*" (James 1:20). When it's God's anger, when it's a righteous anger, then the righteousness of God is going to be worked. And, you'd better learn that, when you raise your voice, you'd also better lift your hands to do something about the situation. It doesn't take a lot of size to criticize—anybody can do that.

1. Anger Shows a Foolish Mind

And so there, the Bible doesn't say, "Be never angry," but it says "*Be...slow to wrath,*" be very careful; because, you see, there are few forms of dissipation that will hurt your testimony, and kill your influence, and reveal your character, more than your anger, and your quick temper. Do you want me to tell you what the Bible says your temper proves about you? If you're one that has a short fuse, if you're one of these persons always flying off the handle, number one, it shows that you've got a foolish mind. Listen to Ecclesiastes chapter 7 and verse 9—Ecclesiastes 7, verse 9: "*Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools*" (Ecclesiastes 7:9)—"*anger resteth in the bosom of fools.*" Now, don't come around here with your vaunted intellectual superiority, for the Bible says that, if you're given to anger, you, sir, are foolish.

2. Anger Shows a Poor Character

But, not only does it show something about your mind, it also shows something about your character. Listen to Proverbs chapter 16 and verse 32: "*He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city*" (Proverbs 16:32). Some people think that anger, a temper—a violent temper—is a sign of strength. Some of you men are bullies in your house. And, you go throwing things around, slapping the kids around, driving like a maniac down the highway when

somebody does something, and you think that's a sign of your strength. It's a sign of your babyhood. You're like a little baby, throwing a temper tantrum.

Listen to what the Bible says: *"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."* And, I'll tell you something else about anger: When you get angry, you lose control, and you open the door to all kinds of other sins that you would not normally commit. You say things that you ought not to say. You do things that you ought not to do.

Listen to Proverbs chapter 29 and verse 22: *"An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression"* (Proverbs 29:22). You just get furious, brother, and your sins are going to multiply, just like that. Things will happen, things will be said that you would give a thousand worlds if you could take back. But, you lose your mind; you lose your control. Listen to that verse again, *"An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression."* Not only does he transgress; he just abounds in it. Somebody said that anger is a stone thrown into a wasp's nest. That's what it is, and you just stir up all kinds of transgressions.

Now, how are you going to deal with this anger? Let me tell you one thing, mister, and dear lady. You had better start treating it as it is—a sin. You know, you'd be surprised—some people are actually proud of their temper. They really are. They say, "Well, we've got red hair in our family. And, I'm just a redhead. Redheads get angry." I'm looking at a few of them. Is that true? Others say, "You know, well, I just get it from my dad. I've got my dad's temper." Yeah, you're of your father—the devil. "Oh," you say, "well, it just lasts a little while." Well, when a man with a hair-trigger blazes away with a shotgun, that just lasts a little while, too. But, somebody else has to go in there and pick up the pieces, you see.

We try to explain it away. We try to minimize it. We try to make jokes about it, like it's funny. But, I want to tell you—it is not weakness; it is wickedness. And, until you start treating that temper as what it is—a vile temper—you want me to tell you why those things spew out of you? Because they're in you. If you want to see what you're made out of, if you want to see what you're full of, you see what spills out of you when you're jostled. And, if you're full of anger, when you're jostled, anger will spill out. If you're full of Jesus, Jesus will spill out. You cannot judge a person by his actions, because he can plan his actions. You watch his reactions—the things he has not planned—and you'll know what that man is full of. And, the only way, ladies and gentlemen, to control your temper is to have a heart full of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But, along with that, James gives—James is so intensely practical—James gives some advice now. And, I want you to notice the chain here. First of all, tune it. Secondly, tone down. Thirdly, sweeten up. You see, when I begin to listen, and when I stop talking so much, then I learn to control my temper, because my thoughts and my words have a

way of stirring up my spirit. Did you know that you can stir yourself up by your own words? Did you know that, if you verbalize things—the right things—you’ll feel right. And, if you verbalize the wrong things, you’ll feel wrong. And, many of you, when you tend to get in an argument with your husband and your wife, if you’ll just watch your words, you’ll be surprised how your words will control your spirit. You say, “I thought my spirit made my words.” Well, many times we talk even before we think, but after we’ve said certain things, then we tend to live by those things. You see, the Bible says, “*Grievous words stir up anger.*” Proverbs 15:1: “*Grievous words stir up anger.*” So, when you listen more, and when you talk less, you’re going to find out that your spirit is more controlled.

*A careless word may kindle strife;
A cruel word may wreck a life.
A bitter word may hate instill;
A brutal word may smite and kill.
A gracious word may smooth the way;
A joyous word may light the day.
A timely word may lessen stress.*

A loving word may heal and bless. (Author Unknown)

And, all of this is possible because we have been born again. It’s all possible through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Now, listen, folks. Tune in right now and listen to me. Jesus Christ did not come to make us nice people. He came to make us new creatures. And, I’m not just giving you a lecture on manners this morning. These things that James is talking about, these are the fruits of being born again.

Have you been born again? Have you received Jesus Christ as your Lord and your Savior? You might as well try to control gunpowder in Hell as to try to control your temper without Jesus Christ, or to control your tongue without Jesus Christ, or to control your thoughts without Jesus Christ.

First of all, you need a new nature; you need to be born again. I want to tell you that God loves you today, and God has a wonderful plan for your life. And, Jesus Christ is knocking at your heart’s door. Jesus Christ wants to come into you and change your life.

Years ago, on the Passaic River, in New Jersey, there was a railroad trestle bridge, and that bridge had to be opened to let the ships pass through. There was a man there who had a very important job. He would sit at the control—the giant levers—and he would pull these, and push them, and make the huge gears turn. And, this bridge would swing on its hinges to let the ships go through. And then, he would have to move the

bridge back very quickly for the passenger train to come through.

On a particular occasion, he had his eight-year-old son there with him. And, the son had come to watch his daddy work, and the son was standing out there near the river, and near the giant works there in the great gears. And, this father had opened the bridge to let a ship through, and then he had to close it quickly because a passenger train was coming. But, as he was in the business of closing the bridge, his son fell into the swift moving waters of that river. And, he cried, “Daddy! Daddy! Help me, Daddy!” And, the daddy, knowing that he could not possibly leave those controls—if he did, the train would plunge into the abyss, and plunge into the river, the father had to make a decision. And there, doing as he felt God would have him do, he stayed at the controls, and closed the bridge, while his son disappeared in the murky waters.

Later, of course, he was unable to find the boy—the boy was gone and drowned. And, when I heard that story, I thought about it, and I thought, “How many of those people who went by in that train saw the bridge-tender, and waved at him, and never realized the price that he paid for them?”

I hope today you'll not just give God a smile and a wave. I want you to know that He put His darling Son on the cross that you might go to Heaven. I want you to know that “*God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son*” (John 3:16). And, I want you to know that God loves you. Listen to me now—listen. God loves you. God wants to save you. God brought you here this morning to hear it, and God brought me here today to tell it. And, if you will receive Jesus Christ, He will forgive your sins; He will come into your heart, and give you a new nature. And, one day, He'll take you to Heaven to be with Him.

Marriage: Duel or Duet?

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: April 6, 1990

Main Scripture Text: James 1:19; 3:5–8

*“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man
be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:”*

JAMES 1:19

Outline

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I. Confrontations

- A. Tune In
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II. Communication Killers

- A. Playing the Judge
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- A. Don't—
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 - 2. Appease
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Conclusion

Introduction

Jesus said, *“If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink”* (John 7:37). And, the only people who go away unsatisfied from that living water are those who are filled with the stagnate water of self-love. But, if you'll seek the Lord Jesus, today, if you don't know Him, listen to me, if you'll seek Him today, you can find Him.

Take God's Word and open, please, to the book of James chapter 1, and in just a

moment we're going to read a formula that will change your marriage from a "Duel" to a "Duet." One verse, just one verse out of the Word of God, properly understood, I guarantee you, will transform a marriage.

Now, we're talking about a duel. Is it common to debate with your mate? Hum, well, it is. Almost all folks who are married sometimes get into it. Now, look up here all you holy-looking people and just nod your head this way. Sometimes we get into it. Now, sometimes some folks stay in it. I mean, you'd think they were married by the secretary of war rather than the justice of peace. I mean, they just stay in it.

I. Confrontations

Well, the most important thing, believe it or not, is not whether or not you have confrontations. The most important thing is this, how do you handle those confrontations? Look in James 1 verse 19: *"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath."* Better words, truer words, or more helpful words could not be said in a shorter sentence. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. Now, what he is really saying is this, "Tune in, tone down, sweeten up." That's what it says. "Tune in," be swift to hear. "Tone down," be slow to speak. "Sweeten up," be slow to wrath.

A. Tune In

Now, I want us to think about these things in some detail. First of all, he tells us that we are to tune in. And, He's talking there about the awesome power of the listening ear. You know the Bible says in Proverbs chapter 18 and verse 13: *"He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him."* To speak before you listen.

All good marriage communication, or communication anywhere else, begins with listening. Did you know that psychologists tell us that we really only catch about twenty percent of what we hear? Really only about twenty percent. Being a preacher, I think perhaps it's less than that.

And, then you know, so many times what we hear is not clear anyway, and it's garbled. I picked up this sentence the other day, "I know you believe you understand what you think I said, but I'm not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant." Have you ever listened to a person talk that way? I mean, when they're finished you really don't even know what they have said and you have to listen so carefully.

Now, for the sake of time, I'm gonna buzz right past that and just say "tune in," learn to love your mate. Are you listening with your ears and with your eyes? Because there's verbal communication, there's visual communication. "Tune in," listen. One man said, "My wife goes around the house all day long just talking with herself." His friend said, "Does she know she's doing it?" He said, "No, she thinks I'm listening to her." Now, now

listen. “Tune in,” begin to listen. Love with your ears and love with your eyes.

B. Tone Down

Secondly, tune in, tone down. Learn something of the awesome power of the tongue. Look, if you will, in James chapter 3 verses 5 through 8. James says, *“Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!”*

Now, Mr. Torched Tongue, may I tell you that you can burn down your marriage with your tongue! But, now continue. *“And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame.”*

Tiger-tongue, listen to me. You shred and claw with your mouth, we used to say, “Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” That is absolutely absurd and silly. Your tongue can be like a vicious beast. And, then let’s continue to read, he goes on to say in this same chapter, speaking of the tongue, *“But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.”*

Tetanus-tongue, you poison love! It always sounds so cute when we say these things. I’m always reminded when I think “torch-tongue,” “tiger-tongue,” and “tetanus-tongue” of Winston Churchill and Lady Aster, who were always at it. Lady Aster said to Winston Churchill, when she was infuriated by him, she said, “If I were your wife, I’d put arsenic in your tea.” He said, “Madam, I can assure you that if you were my wife, I would gladly drink it.” On another occasion it’s said that Winston Churchill was drunk and Lady Aster said to him, “Churchill, you are drunk!” He said, “That is true, and you are ugly.” “But,” he said, “Tomorrow I will be sober.”

II. Communication Killers

My dear friend, there are seven deadly games that people play with their tongue. I want you to listen to ’em. If you’re married, don’t play these games, they’re deadly.

A. Playing the Judge

First of all, it is playing the judge. One partner assigns himself or herself the duty of being a judge. And as the judge, you blame and condemn your partner. Never say to your partner, “It’s all your fault. You should be ashamed!” As a matter of fact, it’s probably bad ever to start a sentence with “you” in an argument. “You always” or “you never.” You’re almost always wrong when you use the word always. “You always do this,” or “you never do that.” Try this if you like to play judge, rather than saying “you,” begin this way, “I feel this way,” or “I think this,” or “it seems to me,” or “I need.” Don’t

play judge! All right?

B. Playing the Professor

Don't play professor. Now, there are those always in marriages who want to play the professor. That is, they want to talk down, and they want to act superior. And, the marriage is full of constant put-downs and belittling. Well, you say to your partner, "Hey, that's stupid. If you had an ounce of brains, you'd know that's not right," or, "you could never understand, you're not a woman," or, "you could never understand, you're not a man." We put our mates down.

One man said to his wife, "I can't understand how God could've made you so beautiful and so dumb at the same time." She said, "It's simple. He made me beautiful so you'd be attracted to me, and made me dumb so I'd be attracted to you." Constant put-downs! When you attack your partner's self-worth, when you belittle your partner, your partner's going to be defensive if you attack their self-worth.

C. Playing the Psychologist

Don't play the psychologist. That's a third game you don't want to play. Don't play the psychologist. Don't sit around and try to analyze your mate. "Let me tell you why you said that." "Let me tell you why you think that way." Well, why should you not do that? Cause you don't know. Probably they don't know either. Do you know the Apostle Paul said, "It's a small thing with me that you judge me." He said, "I don't even judge me. We'll wait 'til God comes, then every man shall have praise of God." Don't assign motives to your partner's heart. Don't assign motives to your partner's heart. Don't play the psychologist. It's a deadly game.

D. Playing the Historian

Don't play the historian. That's another game that people play. They correct the detail of every story that the partner says. The incredible thing is I was preparing this sermon, I just finished it yesterday on an airplane, and sat down to supper last night. We were having supper, and our son is building a house down in Florida, and our daughter, Janice, said, "How far is Steve's house from his old house?" And Joyce said, "Well, a block and a half." I said, "Well, I don't think so." Janice said, "Who cares." That's something, you know, I don't like other people to do it and here I just prepared the sermon, and here I'm doing it. Have you ever been out to supper and somebody's gonna tell a story and they say, "You know last Tuesday we were going to..." And you say, "No, dear, it wasn't Tuesday, it was Wednesday." "No it was Tuesday." No, I know it was Wednesday because Wednesday's the day I take the laundry..." Who cares!

Don't, my dear friend, play the historian. Don't contradict or correct your mate unless it is necessary. And, a lot of times we play the historian just to pull the smoke screen over the whole thing, we're losing the argument, and so we just change the subject to

something that happened way back yonder, some other time. You know, one man said, “Every time we get in an argument, my wife gets historical.” He said, “You mean hysterical?” He said, “No, I mean historical. She brings up every hour of the past, and just resurrects these old things.” Don’t play the historian, stick to the subject.

E. Playing the Dictator

Don’t play the dictator. That’s another game that people play. They use force in the marriage. It might be just the force, verbal force, “I will not allow that in my house.” Or, “I demand that you do thus and such.”

My dear friend, you beware of ultimatums in marriage. Don’t make ultimatums. You keep your words warm and sweet, because you may have to eat ’em. Worse than an ultimatum is a veiled threat. “If you do that again, you just wait, you’ll see what happens.” You don’t say what it is, you just leave that up to their imagination. “Just try that one more time, and you’ll see what happens.” You see, the dictator is the person who changes that marriage relationship from “I do” to “You’d better.” And, they try to force their way.

Let me tell you some clubs that the dictator uses. First of all, there’s the physical thing. They’re the men who strike their wives. If you do that, sir, I’m telling you that there’re very few people as low on the totem pole as you are, a man that would physically strike his wife. Sometimes wives physically beat up their husbands and they are physically stronger.

And, then there’s the opposite of that. There’s the dictator who doesn’t use brute force, but there’s the neurotic invalid. Did you know that some people just get sick and they become invalids? Not really sick, I’m not talking about people who’re truly sick. I’m talking about neurotic invalids, it’s a form of dictatorship. There are those who withhold money in order to have their ways. There’re some who withhold affection in order to have their ways.

There’s the martyr who sulks and pouts. May I tell you that dictatorship in marriage is cruel? It leads to frustration. It says to the partner “I can do a better job with your life than you can.” It robs the other person of self-esteem. Don’t assume the role of the dictator.

F. Playing the Critic

Ah, then there’s the critic. Playing the role of the critic. Don’t condemn your partner, and don’t criticize your partner. But, above all, don’t compare your partner. Don’t compare your mate with somebody else’s mate. Don’t ever say, “Why can’t you be like?” Perhaps if you were married to the person that you’re comparing with, you might have a different story. Don’t compare your partner to her mother or his father. “You’re just like your mother.” One man said to his wife, “Why can’t you cook biscuits like my mama could?”

She said, “Why don’t you bring home dough like my daddy used to?” Always comparing. Don’t play the game of the critic. And, never criticize something over which the other person has no control like his parents, physical traits, or attributes.

G. **Playing the Preacher**

Last of all, here’s another deadly game that you don’t play. Don’t play the preacher, the preacher. Now, this is perhaps, the most insidious of all. This is where we want to preach to the other partner. We assume a sort of a holier-than-thou attitude. We become his conscience and we try to be the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we use the Bible as a club to beat up our partner with.

Now, I’m not saying you ought not to share the Word of God. I’m not saying that you ought not to discuss the Word of God, but don’t you in a family discussion, get out your little pulpit, wherever it may be, and begin to preach to the other person. It’s destructive in marriage relationships. Share Scripture? Yes. Build your life on the Word of God? Yes. But, don’t pontificate with a holier-than-thou attitude. I remind you again of what Ruth Graham said, “It is a wife’s job to love her husband, it is God’s job to make him good.” My dear friend, don’t play these games.

III. **Conflict Resolution**

Now, here is the third thing, listen. “Tune in,” “tone down,” and “sweeten up.” This verse says that you are to be slow to wrath. Now, what you’re to do is to resolve your hurts, not to dissolve your home. They can be resolved.

A. **Don’t—**

I want to give you three do’s and three don’ts, and I’ll be finished with this message. Three things I want you to know, first of all, not to do if you’re having a conflict.

1. **Avoid**

Number one, do not practice avoidance, where you just retreat and you just avoid confrontation. Somebody has written a book, and it is a good book, *Caring Enough to Confront*. Have you ever played this game in your home? “Hey, is something wrong with you?” “No.” “Are you sure there’s nothing wrong?” Do you ever play that game? “Well, I think there’s something wrong.” “I told you, there’s nothing wrong!” And, both of you know there’s something very wrong. But, we just tend to back off and retreat, we have the idea that it’ll go away.

Why do we retreat? Several reasons. Sometimes we fear the anger of our partner, so we just close up. Sometimes we may be afraid “If I don’t retreat, our marriage will be broken.” Sometimes, and I suppose this is the most insidious of all, we retreat because we’re afraid if we get into argument and a discussion, we might have to admit something about ourselves. We might have to see where we, ourselves, really are

wrong, and so we just retreat.

But, my dear friend, unresolved conflict is not really resolved by retreating, it only gets worse. You may stuff it, you may repress it, but I will guarantee you that your stomach will keep the score. You have a problem, you shove it out the front door, refuse to discuss it, it crawls around the house, and comes in the basement window. Don't practice avoidance. The wounds of a friend are better than the kisses of an enemy. Love your mate enough to confront.

2. Appease

Number two. Don't practice appeasement. Some don't avoid, they just appease. They just have the say-so, and then they give in. One person always seems to win, and the other person always seems to lose. One person always seems to dominate, and get his or her way, and the other person simply appeases and gives ground.

Now, to compromise is one thing, that's where both give. But, to appease is something else. Sometimes we appease and call it compromise. A man said, "My wife and I had a disagreement about where we're going on our vacation. I wanted to go to the seashore, but she wanted to go to the mountains. So, we compromised and went to the mountains."

Now, this is what happens so many times in a marriage, where one person just simply gives. Now, what happens if you appease your husband or if you appease your wife? Constant appeasement. You may think that you're solving the problem, but you're not solving the problem. What happens is you internalize the whole thing, and when he gets violent and you get silent, and you just internalize it. You just give way, and give way, and give way, and give way. It becomes in your heart like a smoldering rag, like oily rags put in a closet. They may burn out, or they may break out and burn the house down.

Now, if you are an appeaser, I'll tell you what else you are. You're a person given to self-pity. You're a person who goes around with a martyr complex. You feel trapped because you know you'll never win. And, while that marriage may stay together, you get an emotional divorce, which is tragic. Do not, do not practice avoidance. Do not practice appeasement.

3. Attack

And, do not practice aggression. Now, when you hear me say don't avoid and don't appease, you think I mean attack. But, I do not. Do not practice aggression. You must face your partner, but the Bible says, "Speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). "Tune in," "tone down," and "sweeten up."

Sarcasm is never in order. I have told you before and I want to tell you again, there are few problems that husbands and wives cannot solve if they will attack the problem,

rather than one another. And, in order to do that you've got to start at the right time.

Choose your times to have a discussion. Sometimes, unfortunately, we can't always do that. But, I said don't avoid an argument, but avoid it at certain times. Right before dinner avoid it, when your blood sugar is low. Psychologists tell us that ninety percent of family arguments begin just before mealtime. Ninety percent. Or, have you ever been on your way to a social event you get in an argument going to a party, or maybe get in an argument going to church, well no confessions this morning. But I mean, on your way to a social event you get in an argument. Well, then you feel trapped, because then you have to turn around and go back home, or go into that event with a smile on your face, and you know on the inside that you, your guts are just churning.

Choose the right time. Use the right tone when you confront. The Bible says, "*A soft answer turneth away wrath*" (Proverbs 15:1).

The right time, the right tone, the right turf. Have you ever noticed that maybe the person who is an appeaser, or the person who does retreat, will sometimes come out of their shell when company is around. And, they will criticize their partner, or assassinate their partner when other friends are around? Do you know why they do that? It's a secret desire to hurt their partner and a secret desire to embarrass their partner. And, they feel they can do it there because they have him trapped, he cannot react, and it is a cheap shot. My dear friend, confront, but do it the right time, the right tone, the right turf.

B. Do—

Now, those are three things "don't" do's. Don't withdraw, don't appease, and don't attack. But, now let tell you three things to do. We're talking now about being slow to wrath, how to "sweeten up."

1. Accommodate

Number one, learn to practice accommodation. Did you know that you need to learn to say, "I will change"? So many times we want to change our partner. But, my dear friend, you are to change you. You have desires for your partner, but goals for yourself. You change you. And, you can change your partner by changing you because now he has to react to someone different, and you have changed.

And, you do that by what we call accommodation. Now, let me show you how it works. For example, suppose there's a wife who says, "My husband and I don't spend enough time together. He doesn't give me enough time." Well, how could she accommodate him, for example? Well, she might learn a sport that he loves. And, maybe they can play that sport together, and she takes up his sport. And so, she accommodates herself. She wants time with him, but she has accommodated. She has changed herself. Practice the art of accommodation. All of us can accommodate our

partners to some degree. And, it is not just that wives have to accommodate husbands, or husbands have to accommodate wives.

2. Accept

Number two. Practice not only accommodation, but practice acceptance. Make up your mind, in accommodation you say, “I change.” In acceptance, you say, “He may never change or she may never change, so I accept it. I just accept my partner.”

Now, you know, there’re certain things that we have to accept about others. And, they are different, they may not be wrong or you may not be wrong. Joyce and I are so different. Joyce and I came from, in many ways, the same background. We have been grade-school sweethearts. I met Joyce in the fourth grade. We didn’t get serious ’til the sixth grade. Now, I’ve known Joyce all of her life, just about and she’s known me. But, in the Gentry household, there were never any little witticisms, never any little jokes, or those things. In the Rogers’ household, they flew back and forth all the time. I mean, you had to duck or you’d get hit in the crossfire. All good-natured, but just constantly back and forth like that. Well, to me, if you love somebody, you tease ’em. Joyce said, “Just say what you mean, and mean what you say.”

Well, who’s right? I am, of course. No. Listen, it, they’re just different. Around our house, we didn’t make a lot of birthdays, special events, or to send cards. But, around her house, those were the big days, and you certainly did that. Well, who’s right or who’s wrong? I’m afraid she is. But, I really wasn’t wrong. It’s just the way I was raised. And, you just have to accept how the other person is. You see, getting married is like buying a phonograph record, you buy it because of what you want on one side, and you just take what comes on the other side. You just, accept your mate.

3. Adjust

And, my dear friend, listen, there is accommodation, acceptance, and last of all, there is adjustment. And this is the best. In accommodation, I change. In acceptance, I make up my mind they’ll never change. But, in adjustment we both change. And, that’s so wonderful. When both change, when we adjust.

Again, Joyce turns into a pumpkin about nine o’clock at night. Phew, I mean, she’ll just disappear. She’ll be sitting there and at suppertime, if it’s too late, her face may fall in the plate. I mean, she’ll just go to sleep. Now, the longer I go, the faster my engine runs. And, I mean it just seems a shame to me to go to bed at eleven o’clock, or something like that, or twelve o’clock, cause I’m just getting started. I mean, the longer I go the stronger I get. But, in the morning it’s hard to get the bed off my back. I cannot, it’s just hard.

Now, I don’t want you to think I lay in. I have to get up. But, I tell you, it’s a battle every morning. I believe in the resurrection, I have one every morning. Listen, every

morning I have to be resurrected, but she wakes up, boing! Dat, dut, ta, da, da, da. I wake up to Joyce rushing around the house, singing, and everything. Boy, now, what do you do when you get a lark and an owl? Well, you have adjustment. I go to bed a little earlier and she stays up a little later. You see?

That's adjustment. Rather than having a war, where both lose, you have a compromise where both gain a little bit. Now, my dear friend, don't avoid it, don't appease, and don't attack. But, on the other hand, my dear friend, accommodate, accept, and adjust. It'll be worth it.

Conclusion

Let me share with you what Peter Marshall had to say. He said this about marriage, he said, "Dearly beloved, the marriage relation, when rightly understood and properly appreciated, is the most delightful, as well as the most sacred and solemn of all human relations. It is the clasping of hands, the blending of lives, and the union of hearts, that two may walk together up the hill of life to meet the dawn. Together bearing life's burdens, discharging its duties, sharing its joys and sorrows. Marriage is more than moonlight and roses. It is much more than the singing of love songs, and the whispering of vows of undying affection. In our day, it is by many lightly regarded, and by many as lightly discarded. But, marriage will ever remain in the sight of God an eternal union, made possible only by the gift of love, which God alone can bestow." And, that is so true. My dear friend, marriages are kept alive by God's grace.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Heads are bowed, eyes are closed. Father God, remind us one more time to accept the to Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. And, Father, how I pray, in the mighty name of Jesus, that there will be those today who will say an everlasting 'Yes' to you and be saved. Hear our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Four Ways to Understand the Bible

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: February 5, 1997

Main Scripture Text: James 1:21

Sponsored by: Sponsor

“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”

JAMES 1:21

Outline

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- II. Receive the Word with a Receptive Spirit
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Conclusion

Introduction

In just a moment we're going to begin reading in verse 21. But I believe this: That most of us would like to understand the Bible better. Is that not true? Most of us would like to understand the Bible better. But most of us are playing at Bible study. And even those who are earnest about Bible study, many of them are not receiving the satisfaction, ah, that they would like to receive. Now the Bible is a wonderful Book. And somebody has said that the Bible is so deep, ah, that the scholars can swim and never touch bottom, and yet so shallow that a little child can come and get a drink without fear of drowning. That's true. That's the way God's wonderful Word is. But yet, again, many folks don't have a lot of real satisfaction in the study of the Word of God.

Now I want to talk to you tonight about four ways that you can better understand the Word of God. And they're found right here in James chapter 1, beginning in verse 21. And I want you to listen to this Scripture, and then we're going to talk about it.

Let's back up to verse 19: “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness,

and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”

Now these hath God married and no man shall part: dust on the Bible and drought in the heart. Now, if you're tired of that dryness, and you want God's Word to become to you a perennial fountain, then I want you to pay attention. Now he's talking here about the salvation of your soul in verse 21. Look at it. He says here, "...engrafted word (the last part of verse 21), that is able to save your souls." Now he, he's writing to Christians. Well, why would Christians need their souls saved? Well, you need to understand that salvation is in past tense, present tense, and future tense. In the past tense, we have been saved from the penalty of sin. In the present tense, our souls need to be saved from the power of sin day by day, right? We need to be delivered. Ah, one day, when Jesus comes, we're going to be saved from the very possibility of sin because we're going to be taken from the presence of sin and be made like the Lord Jesus Christ. Now it's that middle salvation that he's talking about - saving your soul from the power of sin. The Greek word for soul is what? Psyche or psuche. It's the same word, ah, we get, ah, psychiatric from, psychology from, psychic from. And what is the soul? Roughly speaking, it's, it's the mind, the emotion, the will. Now, when you receive the engrafted Word of God, it is able to deliver, to save, your mind, your emotion, and your will. That's what you need right now. You're already going to heaven, but what you need right now is that kind of salvation so you can live day by day as an overcomer. And the Bible says you're going to do that through the Word of God. You're going to receive the engrafted Word that is able to save your soul. So how should you receive the Word of God? How should you study the Word of God?

I. Receive the Word with a Repentant Spirit

Well, you need to receive the Word of God, first of all, with what I want to call a repentant spirit. Look in verses 19 and following again. He says here, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man (that is, your anger) worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart or lay aside all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls." Now what he is saying is, if you want to study the Bible, repent before you get into it. Lay certain things aside. Ha, ha, you know, you may have thought that once you got saved you were finished

with repentance. No. I want to make this confession. I've done far more repenting after I got saved than I ever did before I got saved and when I got saved. And do you know why? Because after I've been saved I've learned a whole lot more about Jesus and I've learned a whole lot more about me. And you're going to find out that when you're truly saved your life is going to be one of continual repentance.

Now look at the words here in this passage of Scripture. He says here that we're to lay aside filthiness. The word filthiness here is the Greek word *rhupa*, and it has sometimes the meaning of wax in the ear.

I was just talking to my father the other day. And he went down to get tested for hearing aids. They said, "Before we can fit you for a hearing aid, we've got to clean your ears out. Ah, you've got wax in your ears. And that's one of the reasons you can't hear very well." And I think that some of us have sin in our lives that is to, ah, the spiritual life what wax is into the ear. We, we cannot hear the Word of God. And before you plant the seed of the Word of God, you've got to weed the garden.

The word superfluity of naughtiness – look at that. Ha, we don't talk that way any more. I'm using King James Version of the Scripture. "...lay aside all superfluity of naughtiness..." What does that literally mean? It means that which is left over (coughing), the remainder. You see, we've been saved. We repented of our sin. We trusted Christ as our personal Savior. But, if you're like I am, you found out that when you got saved you didn't sprout wings and get a halo, isn't that true? Ha. You still have that superfluity of naughtiness. You have, you have that leftover sin, that which remains.

When Lazarus came out of the grave, he had received life. But what did Jesus say to this, those around about Lazarus? "Loose him and let him go." That is, he came out of the grave still wearing the grave clothes of the old life. He needed to be unwrapped.

When the prodigal son came home, he came home to the father, and the father had received him, but he was wearing a filthy robe. And the Lord said, "Put a new robe on him."

You know, we can be saved and we can still have some of those hangover sins, isn't that right? I'm not proud of it, but when, as a teenager boy, I got saved, I had a bad vocabulary. I'm talking about some words that ought not to be there. And I don't remember what happened, but, ah, something like hitting my thumb with a hammer, though it wasn't that, but it's the counterpart of it. And I opened my mouth and out came those same old words and it grieved me. That's one of the ways I knew I was saved. Those are the hangover sins. And they're in all of our lives. And, and so he's saying it, it, that, that kind of business is like wax in your ears. These are the things that cling to us to keep us from understanding the Word of God.

Now I want to say this: If you really are serious about Bible study, you'll start your Bible study with a clean heart. He says, "...lay this aside, lay it aside and then receive

the Word.” Isn’t that what he says? It’s just as plain as it can be. “...lay aside that filthiness, that superfluity of naughtiness that keeps you from hearing, and then receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your soul,” your psyche. You say, “Well, Pastor, it’s just a little sin.” There are no little sins. They don’t stay little, anyway. Who is it that knocks so loud, a lonely little sin. Slip through, I answered, and soon all hell was in. Keep your heart clean and pure. And when you come to the Word of God, come to the Word of God with a pure heart, a repentant spirit. That’s the first step.

II. Receive the Word with a Receptive Spirit

Here’s the second one. Not only should you receive the Word with a repentant spirit, but receive the Word with a receptive spirit. Look again in verse 21. The Bible says here that you are to receive the Word “...with meekness...” Do you see the word meekness there? Do you know what that word means? Ha, ha. It means a teachable spirit.

In olden days, when a horse would be broken so you could put a saddle and a bridle on it, the old-timers would say the horse had been made meek. And, if you don’t have a teachable spirit, you’re not going to understand the Word of God.

Now he says you’re to receive “...with meekness the engrafted word...” There are two words for receive in the Greek language. One is lambano(?) (coughing), which basically means self-prompted taking. That is, you reach out. You acquire it. You gain it. You take it. There’s another word, dechomai, which means to receive in a reflective way. You just accept. You just welcome. You say thank you. Now, when he is saying “...receive the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls,” he’s using the second word, not the first one. He’s saying welcome the word. Welcome the word with a teachable spirit.

I went to China one time and preached in China. We were going door to door. And the Chinese are wonderful, wonderful people. And you cannot go into a Chinese home without them offering you something. And we were instructed, when you go into a Chinese home and they offer you something, you must accept it, no matter how many cups of tea you’ve had, no many, how many, ah, cold drinks, soft drinks you’ve had. If they offer it to you, you must accept it and you must taste it. Because if you don’t accept it, you’ve not accepted their hospitality. And, if you don’t taste it, you don’t trust them. So whether you drink it all or not, you receive it and you taste it to show that you have accepted their hospitality. And then, here’s what they told us, and I’ve remembered it ever since. They said, “If they offer you anything, never take it with one hand. Because if you take it with one hand, it has the idea of grasping. Take it with both hands, bow your head, and that has the idea of receiving.”

Now that’s the two words that we’re talking about here. Some people have the idea

that they can just go into the Word of God, open it up, get their Greek lexicon, bring their mind to it, get their pencil and their paper, and began to reach in and pull out truth. You can't do it. You can get the facts, but you won't understand this Book until you learn how to welcome the Word and receive it with meekness.

I want to tell you preacher boys who are here from the seminary. You can backslide with a Bible under your arm. You can go to school and you can be learning all of these facts about the Bible, and you can be studying Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. By the way, when Jesus was crucified, they put Latin, Greek, and Hebrew over His head. That's what Luke tells us. You'd better keep it under His feet. And keep your eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ, because you're not saved by facts. You say, "Well, Pastor, I know the plan of salvation." Well, you're saved by the man, not the plan. And you have to receive with meekness, a teachable spirit, ready to obey. And if you don't, why should God speak to you? This word, *dechomai*, I looked it up today in, in another place, trying to find where the word *dechomai* was used. I found it in 11 Corinthians chapter 7, verse 15. It talks about the way the Corinthians welcomed Titus. And it says, "And his inward affliction (**should be affection**) is more abundant toward you, while he remembered the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him." Ah, that's the way you are to receive the Word of God. Jesus said, "If you will (in John 17, verse 7, ah, John 7, verse 17), if you will to do God's will, you will know the doctrine." Do you will to do it?

Now here's a third way that you ought to, ah, receive the Word of God. First, with a repentant spirit. Make absolutely certain there's no unconfessed, unrepented of sin in your heart and in your life as you pick up the Word of God. Number two, with a receptive spirit. Welcome the Word with meekness, saying, "Here I am, Lord. I want to know. I'm ready to do it." Don't parade it past the judgment bar of your mind to make up your mind whether or not you're going to obey.

III. Receive the Word with a Responsive Spirit

Here's the third thing: Receive the Word with a responsive spirit. Look now in verse 22. He says here, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, ha, deceiving your own selves." Respond to what God says (coughing). God says that if you do not respond to what He shows you, that you are self-deceived. I think that's one of the problems in many of our churches, that people come and think they've done God a wild favor if they sit and listen to the Word of God. But if you do not obey and respond to what you hear, if you fail to be a doer of the Word, you're self-deceived. Do you know what Jesus called you? You won't want to hear this, but He called you a fool. You say, "Well, Pastor, the Bible says not to call anybody a fool." I'm not doing it. Jesus is. Let me give you the verse, Matthew 7, verse 26: "And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man..." "When you hear and

you don't do, Jesus said that is foolish. He said in Luke 24: "Oh fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken..."

So what, what about a person who comes to church, and says, "Wasn't the music wonderful?" What about a person who comes to church and hears a sermon, and says, "Yes, that was a fine sermon. Maybe you could do that once a year," and, and then go away and not change. You are the victim of one grand self-delusion if you hear the word and you don't do it. He says, "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." The way to understand the part of the Bible you don't understand is to obey the part that you do understand. Do you know the word believe literally comes from an old English, by-live. What we believe we live by; the rest is just religious talk. Do you respond to the Word of God?

I've told you before something that made a great impact on me when I learned it. Study of the Bible gives you knowledge about God. Obedience gives you knowledge of God. Jesus said when you hear His Word and do it, then you love Him. And when you love Him, you'll be loved of the Father. And Jesus said, "I will manifest Myself to you. I'll make Myself known to you." Now the great danger is that we become hearers and not doers. We get an impression, impression without expression leads to depression. Don't just simply take the Word in.

I see so many folks who come here on Sunday morning with no more intent of doing what I have preached from this pulpit than they have of doing what they watched on television in some drama. It's just a form of some kind of religious entertainment. They're like sponges. They sit, they soak, they sour, they stink (laughter). "Be ye doers of the Word..." Respond to the Word of God. See what happens when you do that. The next time you study your Bible, get something that God says you're to do this, and go out and do it and see how the Bible will become alive to you.

IV. Receive the Word with a Reflective Spirit

Now here's the fourth and final thing that if you would, ah, ah, enjoy the Word of God. Ah, study the Word of God not only with a repentant spirit, and not only with a receptive spirit, and not only with a responsive spirit, but with a reflective spirit, a reflective spirit.

Look, if you will, now in verses 22 and following. He says here, "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass." Now this means in a mirror. "For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."

So he's saying that the Bible is like a mirror. You know, the Bible is such a wonderful

Book. There, there, there are many ways, many figures of speech, that describe the Bible. Jeremiah said the Bible is like a hammer. David said it's like a lamp. Moses said it's like bread. The writer of Hebrew said it's like a sword. Jesus said it's like a seed. James says it's like a mirror. And you look into the Word of God and you see yourself.

Mirrors don't lie. Have you ever wondered why you can't get a better photograph of yourself than you can? (laughter) Go look in the mirror (laughter). Sometimes you can get a better photograph than the mirror. You know, the photographer says, where there's beauty, we take it. Where there's none, we make it (laughter). But the mirror doesn't do that. The mirror shows you for what you are. And James very practically imagines two people that look in a mirror. And then, he says those two who look in a mirror remind him of how some people come to the Word of God. And then, he says those two who look in a mirror remind him of how some people come to the Word of God.

A. **A Casual Glance**

First of all, there's the man who just takes a casual glance, if you will, in verse 23. "For if, ah, if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he's like a man beholding his natural face (that is, his God-given mug) in a, in a mirror." And the idea is it's just, he just looks at himself. This is the way I am. He's putting on his coat. He's snugging up his tie. He blush, brushes back his hair. And he really does not take an honest look. It is simply a casual glance. That is the Bible study of ninety-five percent of the Christians I know, a passing glance. Many who claim to be studying the Word of God and reading the Word of God could not tell you even where they read from. They do a lucky dip. They open it up. They take a glance and then they go their way. Have you ever looked at your watch to see what time it was and immediately forgot – had to look at it again? That's the way some people do when they look at the Word of God. Now God is not going to reveal much truth to the man who just takes a passing glance at himself in the Word of God.

B. **A Careful Gaze**

But then, he talks about a man who doesn't give the casual glance, but he talks about a man who gives a careful gaze. "Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty..." Now the word, ah, looketh here is a very interesting word. It literally means to scrutinize. It means to peer into, to look very carefully.

Suppose you had been there that Easter morning, and the tomb was empty, and you wanted to one, you wanted to see for certain was the body of Jesus still in there. Then you're going to understand how the Bible describes that disciple who looked in in John 20, verse 5. And it says, "And he stooping down and looking in saw the linen clothes lying..." Can you imagine how he must have looked? That's the same word that's used

here is looking into the perfect law of liberty. It's the same word that's found in 1 Peter 1, verse 12. It speaks of the wonderful things that are revealed to us in the Word of God. And it says, "...which things angels desire to look into." The angels, "Oh, I wish I knew that." They want to look into it. That's the way we're to look in the Word of God, with a reflective spirit, just like we're looking in a mirror. Not with a careless glance, but with a careful gaze into the mirror. Now sometimes that's painful.

We saw some missionaries tonight with some people who have primitive lifestyles. Years ago, I read about a woman or a man on the mission field who had a daughter who was a very homely daughter. She had never seen a mirror (coughing) And the missionary brought a mirror, and the girl saw herself for the first time. Her father had told her she was beautiful. She had never seen her face. When she looked into the mirror, she broke the mirror.

I think that's the reason that some of us don't want to spend any more time in the Bible because, you see, listen. Not only do we read the Bible. The Bible reads us. Isn't that true? I mean, we look into the Bible, and the Bible looks right back, and the Bible says, "There you are!" And preachers sometimes read the Bible to get sermons for other people rather than letting God. Sunday school teachers do this sometimes. Rather than letting God speak to you, and you behold your face in a mirror, and you stay there and let God speak to you. And you ask yourself of the Word of God, as you study it, what did it mean then? How does it apply now? And how does it apply to me personally?

All right, let's just check. Don't answer out loud. But how many of us today (coughing) have been before the mirror of God's Word with a reflective spirit? Now, you see, the same mirror, the same word that shows us is the same word that cleanses us. Psalm 119 and verse 9: "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? Be taking heed thereto according to thy word." John 15, verse 3. Jesus said, "You're clean through the word which I have spoken unto you."

Conclusion

Now I'm finished. But these are things that are so simple. But just because they're simple doesn't mean they're not profound. Listen again now. Tomorrow morning, or tonight, whenever you open your Bible, first of all, lay aside all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness. If your heart is not clean, weed the garden before you sow the seed. Get the wax out of your ear so you can hear. That's a repentant spirit.

And then, receive the Word with meekness. Say, "Lord, I, I welcome Your Word, whatever it is. I want to hear it. And I'm not going to come so arrogantly, thinking that with my intellect I can just reach in and snatch out the truth. Speak to me, Lord. Reveal to me the beauty of Your Word." Receive the Word with a receptive spirit.

And then, tomorrow morning, or whenever it is, you begin to study the Word of God. When God shows you something, say, "Yes, sir, Lord. Yes, Lord. I will obey." That's going to be the hard part. And then, just wait for a while before the Lord. Just look in the mirror and you're going to find, first of all, you looking back at you. But you know what else you're going to find? Jesus looking back at you, because you're going to see Him in there also. And as you behold you, you'll repent. And as you behold Him, you're going to be changed from glory in the glory to the same image.

Let's pray. Father, I pray that You will seal this word to our hearts tonight. And, Father, help me, ah, to practice what I preached tonight. And teach us, Lord, as individuals and as a congregation, to receive with meekness the engrafted word that is able to deliver our psyche, for we pray in the name of Jesus, amen.

Now, folks, look up here, right here. Don't move. Don't get your Bibles and don't leave. Just look right here. There are probably, in a congregation this size, someone who needs to be saved. Maybe two, three, ten people. I don't know. God knows. Maybe more. Maybe you're a church member and never been saved. If the rapture were to come right now, you'd be left behind. If you were to die right now, you'd die and go to hell because you've never truly been saved. Now, if you're not absolutely certain that you're saved, you need to be certain, and you can be certain tonight. And, if you would like to receive the Lord Jesus Christ into your heart and into your life, here's what you ought to do. You ought to pray and say, "Lord Jesus, come into my life. Forgive my sin, and save me. Thank You for dying for my sin. I turn from my sin and I trust You to save me." You can say that out loud or you can just pray it deeply in your heart. Then, to show that you mean business, you need to outwardly, openly, publicly acknowledge Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. And you can do that tonight by coming forward down any of these aisles.

In just a moment, standing at the head of each of these aisles, will be a minister of this church to welcome you and receive you. You say, "Well, Pastor, I've never done that. I wouldn't know what to say when I go down there." Just tell the minister that you're trusting Jesus. What we want to do is to receive you lovingly, to spend a few moments with you with an open Bible, to give you some Scripture to stand on, to answer any questions, and to seal your decision in prayer tonight. And you can go away, saying, "Yes, I received Christ as my personal Savior. I was not ashamed of Him. And I know He's not ashamed of me." Other of you tonight need a church home. We're not looking for mere joiners, but if you believe as we believe, you know that you're saved, we would invite you to become a part of the Bellevue family of friends. And I want to invite you to come tonight and tell the minister that you want to place your membership here. Be in a spirit of prayer. No one leaving unless it is an emergency. Let's stand together. And you step out and come on the very first stanza.

Welcoming the Word

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: November 28, 1993

Main Scripture Text: James 1:21–25

“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”

JAMES 1:21

Outline

Introduction

- I. Welcome the Word with a Repentant Heart
- II. Welcome the Word with a Receptive Heart
- III. Welcome the Word with a Responsive Spirit
- IV. Welcome the Word with a Reflective Spirit

Conclusion

Introduction

Take God's Word and turn to James chapter one would you please. And in a moment we're going to begin reading in verse twenty-one—James one, twenty-one. You will never be a growing Christian without a knowledge of the Word of God. May that sink in. You will never be a growing Christian without a knowledge of the Word of God. These hath God married and no man shall part, dust on the Bible and drought in the heart.

But it's not enough even to know Bible facts. You must know the Lord of the Word. You can backslide with a Bible under your arm. You need to understand the Bible. Let's look in God's Word. Verse twenty-one: Wherefore, lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness and receive with meekness the engrafted Word that is able to save your soul, but be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass, that is in a mirror. He beholdeth himself and goeth his way and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was, but whosoever looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth therein, being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the Word, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

And, in that passage, we have four ways to better understand the Word of God. Now, look if you will in verse twenty-one: Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted Word that is able to save your souls. This is written to Christians. He's telling Christians how to be saved.

Receive with meekness the engrafted Word that is able to save your souls. Well, Pastor, I thought we were already saved. Well, we are. Then, why does he say, receive the Word so you can save your soul? Salvation comes to us in three tenses, past tense, present tense, and future tense. The past tense of salvation happens when you receive Christ as your personal Savior and you were saved from the penalty of sin. You will never have to die and go to hell because your sin has been washed whiter than snow with the blood of Jesus Christ.

A Sunday School teacher asked a little girl, I'm told, is there anything that God cannot do? That little girl wisely said, yes, teacher, there's one thing that God cannot do: God cannot see my sin through the blood of Jesus Christ. Thank God for that—that is salvation in the past tense. That's from the penalty of sin. But there's salvation in the present tense. That is from the power of sin. And, even though we'll not go to hell, the devil has not ceased working on us and sin still has its allurements and its attractions and sin is working every day and you know that is true.

So, not only do we need to be saved, past tense; we need to be saved, present tense, from the power of sin; and, one day, when Jesus comes, that's future salvation, we're going to be saved from the possibility of sin. But that day is not here yet. And so it is the Word of God that is able to save our souls. The Greek word for soul is the word "psyche." Able to save your psyche—your mind, your emotion, your will. That's what the soul is—your mind, your emotion, and your will need to be controlled by the Word of God. When your mind, your emotion, and your will is controlled by the Word of God, then you're living in victory.

May I give you a testimony? The thing that keeps me going is not primarily how I feel. It is what I know from the Word of God. I've been on the trail long enough to look back and analyze and say, what is it that keeps me, what is it that holds me? It is the Word of God—sanctify them through Thy Word. Thy Word is truth.

Now the Bible says we are to receive the Word of God. Now, notice in verse twenty-one, receive, do you see it? Receive with meekness the Word of God. They're two words in the Greek language for receive. One is the word lambano and that means to grasp, to reach out and take, to get. He doesn't use that word here because you can't just reach out and snatch the Word of God. You can't just take. Ever so often somebody says, well, I've studied math, I've studied geometry, I have studied physics, I've studied history—I'll study the Word of God. So, he gets a Bible, and he gets him some lexicons, and he gets him a concordance, and he spreads the Bible out, and he takes his mind, and he takes his will, and he takes his determination, and he takes his intellect, and he says, I'm going to master the Bible. He may get the words, but he'll never get the music.

He may learn about the kings of Israel, but he'll never know the King of kings. You see, this is self-promoted taking. It is grasping. It is going into the Bible to extract the

truth. Many people have approached the Word of God that way, and they have failed. But there's another word for receive, and that's the word that is used in verse twenty-one. It is not lambano; it is dechomai, which means to welcome—to receive as though you would receive somebody into your house, as you receive a guest. You say, welcome. Now, if you would understand the Bible, you must learn to welcome the Word. You're never going to take your intellect, you're never going to take your mind and your determination, and go into the Bible and get truth out, but, if you'll open your heart, and open your mind, and welcome the Word.

I've had the joy of preaching overseas in different countries, and one of the countries is in China. And, when I went to China, the guide said, now, when you go to the Chinese, they are the most gracious and hospitable of all people. The Chinese are wonderful people. If you know the Chinese, you will love them. They are so wonderful and so gracious. And, when you come into a Chinese home they want to serve you something, they want to give you something. It is an honor for them to have you come under their roof. They know how to welcome you. They will say, you are welcome in our home and I want to serve you something. And, you ought to receive it, to show that you accept their hospitality. The guide said, if they serve you something, if it's tea for example, never reach out and take it with one hand. That implies you're grasping. Take it with both hands: then you're receiving—then you're receiving.

Now, you don't just reach out and take God's Word. We lift up our hands to Him and we welcome the Word—we receive the Word, we just take the Word by faith and by grace, and let God's Word come into our heart.

Now, having said that, I want to mention to you four ways to welcome the Word—four ways. And so in order to help you understand them, we're going to let all four of these ways begin with the letter R. How do you welcome the Word?

I. Welcome the Word with a Repentant Heart

Number one. You welcome the Word with a repentant heart—welcome the Word with a repentant heart. Look again in verse twenty-one: Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness and receive with meekness the engrafted Word which is able to save your soul. Now, there is a moral qualification to understand the Word of God. It is not primarily an intellectual qualification, primarily a moral qualification. It is not enough to know Greek and Hebrew, and to have a Bible dictionary. Now, you must lay aside what the Bible here calls the superfluity of naughtiness. Now, that's a word we use a lot, isn't it? That's the reason that some say the King James is hard to understand. What does superfluity of naughtiness mean? It literally means, that which remains; that which is left over.

Now, it means regiceral sin. You see, when you got saved, you repented of your sin,

and you received Christ as your personal Savior and Lord as best you knew how; but you were you were a new Christian. There was a lot that you did not know about Jesus, and a lot that you did not know about you. And so, when you got saved, you were very much like Lazarus who came out of the grave. And, Jesus said to Lazarus, when He raised him from the dead, Lazarus come forth. And, Lazarus came forth. But how did he come forth? He was dressed in the grave clothes of the old life; the stench of the old life was upon him. Now, he had received life. He had come out of the grave, but he still has the grave clothes on. And Jesus said, loose him and let him go. In other words, take that off that remains, that superfluity of naughtiness. Take the grave clothes of the old way off of him.

Or, when the prodigal son came back to the Lord. Do you remember that in Luke fifteen? The prodigal son came back to his father rather and he came back he was dressed in rags and the Lord said, put shoes on him, put a ring, put a new robe on him, take off those rags, that which is left over.

Now, what does that mean to you. Well, you may be saved and on your way to heaven, but you've got some superfluity of naughtiness. You've got something that remains. I'm going to tell you something. I repented of my sin when I received Jesus Christ as my personal Savior, but I have done far more repenting after I got saved than I did when I got saved. Isn't that true about you? I've done far more repenting. Because I had gotten saved, I've learned so much more about me, and I've learned so much more about the Lord Jesus Christ, and so, the Bible says you lay aside that superfluity of naughtiness and filthiness.

Now, the word filthiness—do you know what the word filthiness is? You'll be surprised: ear wax—ear wax. The word lupus means ear wax. Now, what God says is, if you want to hear, you've got to clean out your ears. Musically, you can't hear if your ears are stopped. God says that sin in your life is like wax in your ear. Just get rid of it. Get rid of it. Listen, friend. To hear God, there is a moral qualification. It is so simple, yet it is so profound. The reason that so many of us do not understand the Bible when we read it, the reason that God's truth does not come into us, is that we've got hangover sin, that superfluity of naughtiness. We've got spiritual wax in our ears. And, therefore, it is absolutely important that when you study the Bible that you make a full confession of sin and ask God to search your heart and see if there be some wickedness in you. Get your heart clean, get your heart right with God.

Now, if you're going to a garden, before you plant the seed, you weed the garden. That's what it's all about: just get your heart right. So many times we sing that song, fill my cup, Lord; I lift it up, Lord. Well, you think He wants to fill a dirty cup? Maybe we ought to sing, Cleanse my cup, Lord; I've messed it up, Lord. And then, after God cleanses the cup, He'll fill the cup. After we weed the garden, then the seed will grow.

After we get the wax out, then we can hear. Do you understand that? Receive the Word. Welcome the Word with a repentant heart.

II. Welcome the Word with a Receptive Heart

Secondly, not only should you welcome the word with a repentant heart—verse twenty one—but welcome the Word with a receptive heart—verse twenty-one, look at that also—wherefore lay apart all filthiness and all superfluity of naughtiness and receive with—do you see this next word?—receive with—look at it—receive with meekness—meekness—the engrafted Word which is able to save your soul. Welcome the Word with meekness. What is meekness?

Meekness is a teachable spirit. To be meek is to be teachable. In olden times—and I've told you this when we've preached on the Beatitudes—when people would take a stallion full of fire, and power, and strength, they'd want to be able to ride that stallion, they'd have to break it so they could put a bridle and a bit and a saddle on it. When that powerful animal had been broken, not crippled, broken, the fire, the stamina, the strength, is still there, but when he had been broken, they said he had been meeked—he'd been meeked. That was the word. I'm going to meek a horse. That means, I'm going to break this horse.

Did you know that God wants to be able to put the bridle and the bit on you? Did you know that God wants to break you and take you under His control and make you sensitive to His commands? That's a meek spirit. That is a receptive spirit.

Now, you say, I want to learn the Word of God. Question: Are you meek? First question: are you clean? Second question: are you meek? Do you have a teachable spirit? I will give you a promise from the Word of God. It is John chapter seven and verse seventeen. Jesus said, if any man will do God's will he shall know the doctrine. If any man will do God's will he will know the doctrine. You see, it is the will that must be surrendered. It is not primarily the mind; it is the heart, the will. I want to know. God says, if you will to do my will, you will know the doctrine.

I shared with you before the story of a man who came to see me. I'd never met him. I was a pastor on the space coast down at Cape Kennedy. This man was a big shot in the space industry, a big shot, an intelligent, learned man, in many ways. He came into my office, he said, Mr. Rogers, I need my help. It is my wife, she wants to commit suicide, and I don't want her to. I thought that was nice; he didn't want her to. And, he said, I wish you would talk with her. I said, I will, sir, if you will come with her. So they came into my office. I said, madam, would you tell me what the problem is? She began to pour out her heart, but her problem could be summed up in one little three-letter word: him. That man—him. He was a liar; he was an adulterer. He was a gambler. He was a profane man. He abused her physically. He abused her verbally. He abused her

almost every way. He was an arrogant man. I turned to him, and I said, Sir, I want to ask you a question: Are you a Christian? Now, I was not asking for information. I'm just trying to get the conversation started. Are you a Christian? Hah, he laughed. He said, no, I'm not a Christian. I'm an atheist. I said, oh? He said, yes, I 'm an atheist. I said, well, an atheist is a man who knows there's no God. Do you know there's no God? He said, Yes. I said, well, that's very interesting. I said, of everything there is to know, how much would you know? Do you know all there is to know? He said, of course not! Said, nobody knows everything. I said, well, would it be generous to say you know half of all there is to know? Well, he said, yes, of course. I said, I thought you said you knew there was no God. Wouldn't you have to admit the possibility that God might exist in that half of the knowledge you don't have? Well, he said, I don't think there's a God. I said, well, that's different. You're not an atheist; you're an agnostic. He said, yeah, that's what I am—an agnostic. I don't think there's a God. I said, well, agnostic, that just means a doubter. I didn't tell him the Latin equivalent is ignoramus, which, same word, really, same word, both mean just simply, I don't know. I didn't call him an ignoramus. I said, you're an agnostic. He said, that's right. I said, well, that means you're a doubter. He said, Yeah, and I'm a big one. I said, well, I don't care what size. I want to know what kind. He said, well, what kinds are there. I said, only two: honest doubters and dishonest. I said, which one are you? He said, well, what's the difference? I said, well, an honest doubter doesn't know, but he wants to know, and, therefore, he makes an honest investigation. I said, a dishonest doubter doesn't know, because he doesn't want to know. He can't find God for the same reasons a thief can't find a policeman. I said, you claim to be a scientist. I said, how would you like to prove whether or not God exists? I said, it can be done, if you get in the right laboratory. And, I gave him the verse that I just gave you—John chapter seven, verse seventeen. Jesus said, my doctrine is not mine but His who sent me, and if any man will do His will, He shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God or whether I speak of myself.

God, I don't know whether you exist or not. I don't know whether the Bible is your Word or not. I don't know whether Jesus Christ is your Son or not. But I want to know. And, because I want to know, I'll make an honest investigation. And, because it is an honest investigation, I will follow the result of that investigation, wherever it leads me, regardless of the cost. I said, an honest man would sign that statement. He said, give it to me again. God, I don't know whether you exist or not. I don't know whether the Bible is your Word or not. I don't know whether Jesus Christ is your Son or not. But I want to know, and because I want to know, I'll make an honest investigation. Because it is an honest investigation, I will follow the results of that investigation, wherever it leads me, regardless of the cost.

He said, all right, I want to be honest. I'll do that. I said, wonderful. I said, God's

gonna show Himself to you. He said, where do I start? I said, start with the Gospel of John. That's written that you might believe that Jesus is Christ, and believing, you might have faith in His name. What should I do? I said, just begin to read about a chapter a day, and pray like this: God, I don't even know whether you're there or not. I don't know whether this is your Word or not. But if it is, speak to me. And my mind is made up ahead of time—I will follow you, if you'll only speak to me. I will do your will, if you are there. In several weeks, that man came back to my office, got down on his knees, wept like a baby, and gave his heart to Jesus Christ—was wonderfully saved. The last time I saw them, I saw them sitting in their big white Cadillac holding hands like school kids. She didn't want to commit suicide any more. The last time I heard from him, I got a letter a while back. He's moved up to Maine. I'd almost forgotten about him. But he wrote me a letter. I have it on my file. He told me how he's in a Sunday School ministry there, how he's in a tape ministry there, how he's working in a Christian school up there, and then he said to me, and, Mr. Rogers, I want to thank you for spending time with this general in the devil's army.

Now, where was that man's problem? That man's problem, before he got saved, was not in his head; it was in his heart. He did not have a receptive spirit. He did not have a meek spirit. And the minute that man opened his heart and said, I want to learn, I want to know, I surrender my will, God began to speak to him. That is John 7:17: if any man wills to His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God. You receive the Word with a repentant spirit. You receive the Word, you welcome the Word with a receptive spirit. Have you got it? Now, here's the third way to understand the Word of God.

III. Welcome the Word with a Responsive Spirit

The third R is you welcome the Word with a responsive spirit—with a responsive spirit. Look in verse twenty-two: But be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving your own hearts. You see, once you get your heart clean, once you surrender your will, then, if you would understand the Word of God, begin to obey what God tells you. If you do not respond to what you hear, the Bible says you are self-deceived. Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

No man is a bigger fool than the man who is self-deceived. You know what's wrong with so many folks today? They come to church; they sit, soak, sour; they never they never apply what they hear. And, if you're like a sponge—you sit, soak, and sour, before long you'll stink. You've got to give out what comes in. You receive the Word with a responsive spirit. Did you know that if you hear truth, and don't act on truth, do you know what Jesus calls you? He calls you a fool.

In Matthew chapter seven and verse twenty-six, Jesus said, and everyone who

heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, I will liken unto a foolish man—when a man hears and he doesn't do. Again, Jesus said, in Luke chapter eleven and verse twenty-eight, Blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it. It's not enough to hear. Now, every now and then, people will compliment my preaching. I think a preacher's lying if he says he doesn't like to hear that. You've got a compliment for me, it's all right, help yourself. That's fine. But I want to say this: the best compliment you can give to my preaching is to live what I say—not just to hear it, not just to say, well, you know, Pastor, that was good; wasn't the music wonderful? Whatever. Oh, the best compliment that you can give to the Word of God is to obey the Word of God, to live it out. Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only.

Years ago, I heard of an actor, a famous actor, who was in a crowded theater. They'd come to hear him, and a fire had broken out in the wings of that theater. The manager came to the actor, and said, we could have a bad situation here. There's a fire. It's not out of control, but if the people smell smoke, if the people hear the word fire, they'll all head for the exit. It could be a disaster. They have come to hear you. I suggest that you go out on the platform and you tell them about the fire, but tell them in such a way that they would leave in an orderly fashion.

This great actor, according to this story, came to the platform. He said, ladies and gentlemen, I have an announcement to make. Give me attention. I don't want there to be any undue harm, but I want you to listen carefully. A small fire has broken out in this theater. There's plenty of time for all of us to leave, so I'm going to ask that right now we stand, and in an orderly way, we vacate the premises. They applauded. Wonderful! Wonderful! What a fine actor. They thought it was part of the act—just a story. So, he came back again the second time. Said, no, this is not a part of the act; this is real. There is a fire. Now, there's plenty of time, if you will get up now and exit. Bravo! Wonderful! Isn't he fine? What a wonderful actor. Then realizing the gravity of the situation, he got down on his knees and with tears he said, please, for your safety, leave the theater. Bravo! Isn't that wonderful? See those tears. Bravo! Just a story, but it illustrates how many people hear the Word of God, come and listen to a preacher preach the Word of God: Isn't that fine? Isn't that wonderful? Yes, how we love to hear the Word of God. But God said, consider yourself deceived, if you read the Word, hear the Word, and don't heed the Word. Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only.

The best way to understand the part of the Bible you don't understand is to obey the part you do understand. To him that hath shall be given. To him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. I want to ask you a question: why should God show anybody more truth until that person has acted upon the truth God has already shown them?

Is there a part of the Word that God has been speaking to you about? Maybe in your witnessing life, giving life, your prayer life, maybe in making restitution, maybe in

restitution to the church, maybe about baptism, maybe about confessing Christ openly and publicly—you know that you ought to do it.

Now, please listen to me. Maybe this is the most important thing I'll say this morning. A study of the Bible gives you knowledge about God. Obedience gives you knowledge of God. Jesus said, in John chapter fourteen, and it's a very wonderful passage—Jesus said, he that hath my commandments—John fourteen, verse twenty-one—He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me, and he that loves me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him.

He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. You can say, oh, how I love Jesus all day long, and, if you don't keep His commandments, you don't love Him. He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father. You want God to love you, then you love Jesus. And I will love Him, and Jesus said, I will manifest myself to Him.

Studying the Bible gives you knowledge of God—the knowledge about God; but obedience gives you knowledge of God—makes God real to you.

IV. Welcome the Word with a Reflective Spirit

Now, here's the fourth R, and we'll be finished. Four ways to better understand the Bible, to welcome the Word. You welcome the Word with a repentant spirit. You lay aside that filthiness, get the wax out of your ear, then you're ready for this next thing. You welcome the Word with a reflective spirit. Look, if you will, at verses twenty-three and following. For if any man be a hearer of the Word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass. That means the face you were born with. The word glass here means mirror. He's like a man that looks at his mug in a mirror. For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. Whoso looketh to the perfect law of liberty and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the Word, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

Now, there are many metaphors and figures of speech to describe the Bible. The Bible is called the hammer. It's called a lamp. It's called the bread. It's called a sword. It's called a seed. But here James calls the Bible a mirror. The Bible is a mirror. It reflects. And so, when you go to the Bible, and you look at the Bible, the Bible looks back at you. You see yourself in the Word of God. Read the Bible with a reflective spirit. Let the Bible read you. Now, there's a difference in a mirror. There are two ways you can get an image: a mirror and a photograph. Well, the wonderful thing about a photographer is this: that he can be an artist. You know, where there's beauty, we take it; where there's none we, make it. But the mirrors don't lie. That's the reason we don't like the mirror.

I heard a long time ago about a man who'd never seen a mirror in his life, an old

farmer, and he found one out in a field. And he looked at it, and he said, well, would you be, there's a picture of my old daddy. Look at that. He was so proud of it, he put it up in the attic of his house. His wife saw him up there in the attic. He stayed up there a long time, she being curious. After he came down, decided she'd go up and see what he'd placed in the attic. She rummaged around, and found the mirror—she'd never seen one either. She looked at it, and said, aha, that's the old hag he's been running around with.

A mirror shows us our selves. Now, James imagines two people. He imagines one person who comes and looks in the mirror, and he just glances at the mirror. Look, if you will, in verse twenty-four. He beholdeth himself, and goes his way. He straightway forgets what manner of man he is. And, if you've ever seen a man come to work, he's shaved, and he's cut himself, and he takes a little piece of tissue, and sticks it on there, and then forgets it's there, and then comes to work with it sticking on there like that. Looks ridiculous, doesn't he? But he means to take that off. He's just busy, he's thinking about something, and he forgets it, or you know—whatever—you know, you've got a dirty face, and you say, well, I've got to get that smudge off, and you forget it. You just get a glance and you go your way.

Now, James says that's the way some people are when they look in the Word of God. They just may have a look and a promise. What he's saying is this: Some people—listen to me now—some people are too casual in their study of the Word of God. They just glance in the mirror and they go their way. You know, they say, well, it's time for my quiet time. Well, let me see here. They read a word. Off they go. They're like a man who just glances in the mirror as he goes. He never straightens his tie. He never combs his hair. He never gets the smudge off. He never removes that piece of tissue. He just goes his way.

But James mentions another kind of man—not the man with a casual glance, but the careful gaze. Notice verse twenty-five. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth therein, not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the Word, this man shall be blessed in his deed. And the word here that is used for look means a careful gaze. It means to look penetratingly into the Word of God.

Do you know where it was used? It was used in the Bible for John, when John was at the resurrection. He and the other disciple came to the tomb, and the stone had been rolled away. And, the Bible says that John came, and he looked; stooping down, he looked into the tomb. Had you been there that Easter morning, and you came where your Lord had been buried and the stone was rolled away, oh, would you have just glanced in and just gone on? No, you would look with all of the intensity possible.

I can remember the first time I was in that empty tomb—you were there with us, I can remember. You weren't there the first time I was there, but you were one time. I can remember looking. I wanted to see everything where my Lord was. John wasn't even

sure of that. He looked with intensity into that tomb, not a casual glance, but a careful gaze.

Conclusion

You want to understand the Word of God? Friend, when you read it, bring your mind to it, bring your heart to it, bring everything to it. It's not easy. Tonight, I'm going to talk to you about how to study the Bible. But all I'm telling you right now is, it is that gaze, it is that looking into the Word of God that makes the Bible real to you. And if you will receive the Word today, if you will receive it with a receptive spirit, oh, if you will receive it, my friend, with a repentant spirit, responsive spirit, reflective spirit, it will burst aflame in your hands, and in your life, and it will change your life. Let's bow in prayer.

Father God, your Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our paths. Thank you, Lord, that you've taught us, even from your Word, how to love, and study your Word, and apply it to our hearts. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Making the Bible Come Alive

By Adrian Rogers

Sermon Date: September 28, 1980

Main Scripture Text: James 1:21–25

Outline

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- I. Welcome the Word with a Clean Heart
- II. Welcome the Word with a Yielded Spirit
- III. Welcome the Word with an Obedient Life
 - A. The Casual Glance
 - B. The Careful Gaze

Conclusion

Introduction

Take your Bibles, please, and turn to James chapter 1. And, I want you to begin with me in verse 21. The title of our message: “Making the Bible Come Alive.” So many people say to me, “When I read the Bible, it’s just words. It doesn’t seem to mean anything to me. It doesn’t seem to be a blessing to me. What is the secret of reading the Bible and understanding the Bible and getting that kind of a blessing? How can you get the truth just to leap off the page and into your heart?” That’s what I want to talk to you about tonight: “Making the Word Come Alive”—how to receive the Word of God.

In James chapter 1 and verse 21: *“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any [man] be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like...a man beholding his natural face in a glass. For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”* (James 1:21–25) Now, this is a marvelous, marvelous formula for making the Word to come alive.

I want to tell you, friend, when you study the Bible, Bible facts are not enough. It’s not enough for you just to keep cramming facts into your head. You can be able to name the books of the Bible, name the twelve apostles, say the Beatitudes, give the

Ten Commandments, know the Twenty-third Psalm, you can know systematic theology, you can have a head crammed full of facts and be just as miserable as you can be. I want to tell you—you guys at seminary ought to learn this; you probably already have: you can backslide with a Bible under your arm—now, you really can. As a matter of fact, studying the Bible can be stultifying. It can actually harm you rather than help you. You can lay cold and callous hands upon warm and spiritual truths, and something very strange can happen in your heart. And so, just putting facts in your head is not enough.

Now, the scripture that I've just read to you is written to Christians, and it tells Christians how to be saved. You think Christians wouldn't need to be saved, but this is written to Christians. And, he says, "*Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.*" (James 1:21)

"Now, wait a minute, Brother Rogers. I thought we were already saved. And, he's talking to Christians here, so how can they get their souls saved if they're already saved?" Well, you need to understand that salvation is in three tenses: past, present, and future. In the past tense, I have been saved. That deals primarily with the penalty of sin. Thank God there's no... "*therefore...no condemnation to [those who] are in Christ Jesus.*" (Romans 8:1) That penalty of sin no longer hangs over my head. I'm not going to hell; I have been saved—that's past tense. But, present tense: I am being saved from the power of sin—not only have I been saved from the penalty of sin, but day by day He is saving me; He is delivering me. And, when I feel a temptation in my heart and God gives me that extra-special strength, and when I need a help and God gives it to me, He is saving me—He is delivering me—day by day. And so, that's the present tense of salvation. And then, there is the future tense of salvation. As Paul said, "*Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.*" (Romans 13:11) That is, he's talking about a final deliverance when the Lord Jesus Christ comes and takes us away. So, the past tense: I'm saved from the penalty of sin. Present tense: I'm saved from the power of sin. Future tense: One day I'm going to be saved from the possibility of sin. Hallelujah! That'll be neat. That'll be great. That'll be glorious when we're caught up and we meet the Lord Jesus Christ in the air.

But now, he's talking about the saving of our souls here in this particular verse, and actually, the Greek word for soul is *psuche* or *psyche*. It's the word we get *psychology*, *psychiatrist* from, or *psyche* from, and it means "our self"—or, "our well being," "our mind," "our emotion," "our wills." It's a way of having—of living—a whole life. It's a way of being blessed. It is a way of having your present emotions released by the power of God to be the person that you ought to be. How would you like to have that freedom of spirit—that salvation of soul—that doesn't just deal with going to heaven one day, or

having your sins forgiven yesterday, but living victoriously today? That's what he's talking about.

You know, there are a lot of us who are so concerned about the sweet by and by, but we just don't know how to live in the nasty now and now. And, we have not somehow gotten the victory day by day. **Somebody described our salvation like an old-fashioned bed—one of these iron bedsteads. You know, it's firm on this end and firm on that end and kind of sags in the middle. And, we are glad, you know, that we have been saved, and we're glad that we're going to be saved. But, right now, we're sleeping pretty rough.** All right, now this is what James is talking about now. He's talking about the present tense of salvation. He's talking about taking the Word of God and making the Word of God so alive, and vibrant, and powerful in your life that you are receiving deliverance, that your soul is being saved from the very power of sin. And, the secret, now, is in receiving the Word of God.

Now, notice again—he says in verse 21: *“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word.”* (James 1:21) Now, that word *receive* is a very good word, so let's just slow down and look at that. There are two words in the Bible that are translated “receive.” One of them is *lambano*, which means “to just reach out and take,” “to sort of grasp.” It's sort of a self-promoted taking. It's the kind of receiving the Word that you might get in seminary study. In other words, you just—you say, “Here's a fact. Let me see... What does this say?” And, you just sit down there, and you just sort of reach in and you take it out. Now, that's not the word that he uses here—not the reaching out and taking. That's one word for *receive*. But, he uses a different word, *dechomai*, which means “to welcome,” “to receive gladly,” just like you receive someone into your home when they come to visit you. He's talking here not about reaching out and taking the Word, as such, but he's talking about welcoming the Word—just saying, “Welcome, Word of God, in my heart.”

Now, the secret of a blessing is to welcome the Word. The way to make the Word live—the way to make the Word burst alive—is not that you, with a cold, calculated mind and with a studiousness and all of the accouterments of scholarship, to go into the Bible and there, somehow, just dig out the truths. There is a place for that kind of study, but that's not what Brother James is talking about here. Brother James is just talking about a heart that is so warm, so open, so receptive, where you just say to the Word of God, “Welcome. Come on in. I'm glad to see you. My heart is your home,” and you let the Word of God dwell, settle down, abide richly in your heart. That's what we're talking about now.

How are you to receive the Word of God? Three ways—let's look at them. And, if

you will welcome the Word these three ways—if you will receive the Word these three ways—you’ll find that it will begin to burst aflame in your heart; you’ll find that the truths will leap from the printed page into your heart.

I. Welcome the Word with a Clean Heart

Number one: Welcome the Word with a clean heart—welcome the Word with a clean heart. Look again in verse 21: *“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word.”* (James 1:21) There is a moral qualification for understanding the Bible. I don’t care how intelligent you are, and I don’t care how much Greek and Hebrew you may know or think you know—there is a moral qualification for understanding the Bible. And, when you study the Bible, it’s more important to be good than it is smart. You must study the Bible with a clean heart.

Now, the Bible is seed, and before you plant the seed, you have to weed the garden. And frankly, the reason that some of us do not receive the Word and we do not welcome the Word is that we have not laid apart all superfluity of naughtiness. That is, we have not had a clean heart. And, because we’ve not had a clean heart, the Word has not been welcomed to dwell in us richly. We’re to lay these things aside. We are to welcome the Word. We are to receive the Word with a clean heart.

I love that song, “Fill my cup, Lord; / I lift it up, Lord.” (Richard Blanchard) But, I feel that we ought to have one stanza to where it starts out and sings—we sing it this way: “Cleanse my cup, Lord; / I’ve messed it up, Lord.” And, I believe that that’s the problem with many of us—is that we want Him to fill our cup, but our cup is so filthy He’s not going to fill it—He’s not going to cleanse it—because if we want to welcome the Word and welcome the Lord, we’re going to have to do it with a clean heart.

Now, that’s a strange terminology there that Brother James uses when he says we’re to *“lay apart all...superfluity of naughtiness.”* (James 1:21) Now, that sounds like something that Sidlow Baxter would say, doesn’t it? “Superfluity of naughtiness.” Well, what does that mean? What are we talking about? What is “superfluity of naughtiness”? It literally means “leftover sins”; it literally means “hangover sins”—sins that are left over. You know people who get saved and they basically get their hearts right with God—I mean, they’ve been born again; they’re saved. Heaven is their home. And yet, there is in their lives what we call “the superfluity of naughtiness”—this hangover sin, this leftover sin.

I think it’s illustrated in the prodigal son. The prodigal son left the hog pen, and he came to his father’s house. But, remember how he came: dressed in rags. And, remember what the father said? “Take that superfluity of naughtiness off of him and give him a new robe.” (Luke 15:22) Now, he didn’t say it that way, but that’s it, you see: “Put

a new robe on him. He's got a new heart. Take those rags off of him." (Luke 15:22)

Or, do you remember when Lazarus was in that grave and Jesus said, "*Lazarus, come forth*" (John 11:43)? And, Lazarus came forth, but he was kind of mummified like that, coming out of the tomb all wrapped in these winding clothes. And, Jesus said, "*Loose him, and let him go.*" (John 11:44) In other words, here were the grave clothes of the old life, and those things are to be laid aside.

Now, many of you—many of you—have been saved, but you've got hangover sins. Many of you have been saved, but you're still wearing the grave clothes of the old life. Many of you are Christians, but you're still weighted down with that "superfluity of naughtiness." And, you're to get those things out of your life so that the Word of God will be welcome in your heart.

And, there's another word that he uses here. Let's look at that if we will. He uses the word *filthiness*, and that's the Greek word *rhyparia*, which is a word that literally means "earwax"—"earwax." You know, you get earwax buildup sometimes in your ear, and you can't hear. Someone will talk, and you just don't understand. There's something in there that keeps you from hearing. Now, the Lord uses that word here as an illustration of sin or filthiness. There's something that is impeding the Word from coming in. Now, do you need your ears washed out? Hmm? And, do you need to get rid of those handover sins? The reason—the reason—that the Word of God is not being clear to some of us is that our spiritual ears are stopped up. The reason that the Word of God is not being real to some of us is that we still have the grave clothes of the old life. There's still that superfluity of naughtiness.

And so, as you welcome the Word—as you say, "Dear Word of God, come into my heart"—well, then tidy up your heart. If you're going to have a guest, clean up your house, see. You want your guests to feel welcome? Then, clean up your house so the Word of God that you're going to receive will come and dwell richly in your heart. So, welcome the Word with a clean heart.

II. Welcome the Word with a Yielded Spirit

Secondly, welcome the Word with a yielded spirit. Look again, if you will, in verse 21: "*Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word.*" (James 1:21) Now, what does this word *meekness* mean? It means "yieldedness." Meekness is a teachable spirit. Jesus said, "*Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.*" (Matthew 5:5)

In olden times, when they'd take a stallion out to break that stallion, they wouldn't cripple him, but they would break him. And, when they had finished breaking him so he could have bridle, and bit, and harness, or plow, or whatever it was they wanted to use

this animal for, they would say that “the animal had been made meek”—“he had been meeked.” That is, he is now obedient to his master. He now knows the touch of the master’s hand. He is now a yielded horse. Now, this is what God wants out of you. He wants, dear friend, that meekness that, when God says something, you don’t argue with Him; you don’t dispute His Word. There’s a yielded spirit. God says it, and so you just believe it.

Do you know what so many of us do when we read something in the Bible? I’m guilty of doing this. We read something, and we look at it and we say, “Boy, is that really so?” And, we parade that thought past the judgment bar of our own mind, and if it can pass the judgment of our own mind—if it can pass our own jury—then we say, “Well, yeah, that makes sense to me. I believe I agree with that.” Well, friend, it doesn’t make any difference whether you agree with it or not if it’s in the Word of God. I mean, it’s time we just stopped making this past the jury of our mind and just simply say, “God said it,” see. That is a meek spirit—just simply yielding to God because God said it and because we believe it. That is a teachable spirit. Don’t be like that man who said, “I’m open to conviction. I just like to see the man who could convict me.” Now, I think a lot of us are that way: we have sort of a resistance to the Word of God, rather than just saying, “Lord, here it is. I yield myself.” There is a yielded spirit.

You remember what Jesus said? And, I told my Sunday School class about this this morning, but Jesus said, “The way to understand doctrine is to yield your will.” Jesus said in John chapter 7, verse 17: *“My doctrine is not mine, but his [who] sent me. [And] if any man [wills to] do his will, he [will] know...the doctrine, whether it be of God.”* (John 7:16–17) Now, when you surrender your will, when you have a teachable spirit, when you really want to know, when you have a clean heart and a teachable spirit, then you are *“[receiving] with meekness the engrafted word.”* (James 1:21) And, the Word gets in, and the Word is engrafted. It takes root, and it begins to bring forth fruit.

III. Welcome the Word with an Obedient Life

Now thirdly, the third way that you should receive the Word so as to be blessed—not only should you receive the Word of God with a clean heart, and not only should you receive the Word of God with a yielded spirit, but thirdly, you should receive the Word of God with an obedient life—with an obedient life. Now listen—continue to read what Brother James has to say here about receiving the Word. He says in verse 22: *“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any [man] be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like...a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth*

therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." (James 1:22–25)

Now, you say, "God, bless me—God, bless me." Okay, here's how He's going to bless you. Here's your recipe for a blessing. Here's the way to make the Word of God a blessing. Here's the way for the Word of God to burst aflame in your hands and to be real in your life: welcome the Word with a clean heart; welcome the Word with a yielded spirit, and welcome the Word with an obedient life. James says that if, when you hear the Word, you do not respond to the Word in obedience, you are self-deceived: "*if any [man] be a hearer of the word, [but] not a doer, [this man deceives himself].*" (James 1:23) This is what Brother James says; it's very plain: "*For if any [man] be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face [into] a glass.*" (James 1:23) And, and then, he says in the preceding verse that he's deceiving himself by doing that. (James 1:22)

Now, do you know what's wrong with some of the folks who are in this building tonight? You're professional sermon samplers. You hear, but you don't hear. Do you know what they say that a college education is? "A college education is that process by which the material in the professor's notebook gets into the student's notebook without going through the head of either one." Now, I'm wondering if what happens to be in my notebook tonight can get into your notebook or into the margin of your Bible without getting into your life. And, if it does—if you hear these things, but you don't do these things—do you know what Jesus calls you? A fool. Jesus calls you a fool. Jesus said, "*[Whoso] heareth [my Word], and doeth [it] not, [is] likened unto a foolish man.*" (Matthew 7:26) That's what Jesus said.

When a man is a hearer and not a doer, he does something terrible to himself. He commits a crime against himself. He deceives himself, because he thinks he's getting spiritual; he thinks he's doing something right. After all, didn't he come to church? After all, didn't he sit there? After all, didn't he sing? After all, didn't he understand the message? But, he does not put the message into practice, and something terrible happens to him. Remember what I've told you—that *impression without expression leads to depression*. You get deceived. You're hearing truth, and you say, "I don't understand it. I know all those things. Why isn't it working for me?" It's so simple—it's just so simple. You're just not obeying the Word—you're not obeying the Word. "*[And] be ye [hearers] of the word, and not*"—"be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." (James 1:22)

Now, you know, some people come to this church or some other church, and they may go away raving about the music and saying, "How wonderful was the music!" And, they may take my hand and compliment me on the message. But then, they don't obey

the message; they do not live by the precepts of the Word of God. Those people deceive themselves. Do you know the best compliment that you can pay me and my sermons is not to take my hand and say, “Pastor, that was a good sermon”? The best way that you can compliment my preaching is to live by it, see—to live by it. The way that you can show that you believe the Bible is not to pound on the pulpit and slap your Bible and say—and wave it aloft—and say, “I believe it”; the way to prove that you believe the Bible is to obey it. Everything we really believe we live by; the rest is just religious talk. Don’t tell me that you believe the Bible if you don’t obey the Bible—you don’t believe it. Now, you may say you believe it, but you don’t believe it. You see, our English word *believe* comes from an Old English word: *by-live*. What a man really believes he lives by, and the rest of it is just religious talk.

Now, let me just put it to you very simply. If your so-called “knowledge of the Bible” is not making you more like the Lord Jesus Christ, you are a victim of a grand self-deception. If your so-called “knowledge of the Bible” is not making you more like the Lord Jesus Christ, you, my friend, are the victim of a grand self-deception. We are to “*be...doers of the word, and not hearers only.*” (James 1:22) We are to respond with obedience.

Now, look at it again and see what he’s talking about. How are we to respond? How are we to obey? Read verses 23 and 24 with me again: “*For if any [man] be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like...a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgotteth what manner of man he was.*” (James 1:23–24) Now, the glass that he’s talking about here is a mirror, and he’s talking about a man, first of all, who just beholds himself in a mirror. And, this word *behold* means “a passing glance,” just sort of a casual look in a mirror. That’s... The Word of God is likened unto a mirror. There are many emblems, and symbols, and metaphors, and similes, and figures of the Word of God; one of them is that the Word of God is like a mirror.

A. The Casual Glance

Now, James says the self-deceived man is the man who just passes by the mirror of the Word, and he looks in—he sees himself for just a moment; he just glances at himself—and then he goes his way and forgets just how ugly he is. He—or just how whatever he is, how dirty his face is or whatever—he just glances in, and then he goes his way. Now, that’s the casual glance. That’s what many of us are doing to the Word of God: we’re just making a casual glance into the Word of God. It’s a mirror. But, rather than standing there, and studying, and looking, and examining ourselves in God’s spiritual mirror, we just sort of give it a look and a glance and on we go. And, even our devotional life—we

have a little spiritual sandwich, a little knickknack, a little Ritz cracker from the Word, and on we go. We do not know what it is to sit down and dig out meat and milk from the Word of God. Well, there is that casual glance.

B. The Careful Gaze

But then, there is a careful gaze. Look again in verse 25: *“But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the [word], this man shall be blessed in his deed.”* (James 1:25) Now, as over against the casual glance, there is the careful gaze. This word “looketh into” means “to peer into,” “to study deeply,” “to scrutinize,” “to spend time looking, looking, examining the Word.”

Do you remember when the disciples came to the empty tomb and the Bible says that John stooped down and looked into the tomb? (John 20:5) Can you imagine how intently he must have looked into that tomb with piercing eyes into the darkness of that tomb? “Is He there or is He not there? What has happened here?” Can’t you see the Apostle John as he looks into that tomb—the intense gaze into that tomb? That is the same word that is used of John there in John 20, verse 5 that James uses here when he talks about looking into the Word. He’s not talking about that little casual glance; he’s talking about peering into the Word of God. He’s talking about an intense gaze into the Word of God that, when you see what God is saying, then you say, “Sir, your Word is my command. I will obey.” And, James says this man is going to be blessed.

Conclusion

Now folks, the message has been very simple tonight, but very pertinent. Would you like the Bible to be more real to you? Would you like to welcome? Would you like to receive it as one receives a guest into your home? Would you like to receive the Word of God into your heart? All right, do it now. Do it with a clean heart. *“Lay [aside] all...superfluity of naughtiness [and filthiness].”* (James 1:21) Get your ears unstopped—with a clean heart. Number two: Do it with a yielded spirit. Do it with meekness, saying, “Lord, I’m not going to argue with this.” Who can argue with God? You said it. All right: “I have a yielded, teachable spirit.” And thirdly, do it with an obedient life. *“What he saith [unto] you, do [it].”* (Genesis 41:55) And, if you’ll start doing these three things—and you tell me if I’m wrong, but if you’ll start doing these three things—this book will come alive and you will be blessed. But, if you don’t do it, yet you come to church and make little notes and so forth, you, my friend, are that guy that just glances in the mirror and goes his way. You’re a victim of self-deception, and how pitiful you are.

Let’s bow together in prayer. Father, thank you for your Word. Lord, I’ve surely preached to my own heart tonight. And Lord, I’m under conviction about not gazing into

your Word, not opening my heart and welcoming your Word as I ought. Help me to do it, dear Lord, and help us to do it. For we pray in Jesus's holy name. Amen.

Welcoming the Word

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: July 9, 1978

Main Scripture Text: James 1:21–27

“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”

JAMES 1:21

Outline

Introduction

- I. Welcome the Word with Repentance
- II. Receive the Word with Readiness
- III. Receive the Word with Responsiveness

Conclusion

Introduction

I want you to take your Bibles now and turn to James chapter 1, and we'll begin reading where we left off this morning. And, that is with verse 21, James chapter 1 and verse 21. We want to speak to you on a truth that we studied together some time ago. But, since we're going verse by verse through James, we will restudy and reemphasize this truth tonight. And, it is how to receive The Word of God.

“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed”—or in his doing—“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:21–27).

Now, the Bible is full of great facts. And, these facts are even more than facts, they are truths. But, these truths can do you no good, even if you know them, if you don't receive them. To have facts is not enough. Someone says, “I know the plan of salvation.” Well, dear friend, I want to tell you that you can know the plan of salvation,

and believe the plan of salvation, and go straight to Hell. You're not saved by the plan of salvation. You're saved by the man of salvation, and His name is Jesus. And, there are a lot of people who know the theology, but they have never received the truth.

And, I want to tell you sir, that you can back slide with a Bible under your arm, if you do not receive The Word of God. It is one thing to have facts about Jesus; it is another thing to know the Lord Jesus Christ. It is one thing to hear The Word of God; it is quite another thing to welcome The Word, to receive The Word.

Notice in verse 21, James is talking about receiving The Word, "*Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word*"—that is the word that gets in. It means the implanted word that is alive like a seed. Receive that living word—"*which is able to save your souls*" (James 1:21).

"Now, wait a minute pastor. What do you mean save our souls? We're already saved." And, the book of James is written to save people, written to the 12 tribes scattered abroad, those who're already saved. Why do they need to be saved if they already have been saved?

Well, learn this about salvation. Salvation is in three tenses. We have been saved. We are being saved, and we shall be saved. There's no contradiction. All three truths are there. I have been saved—that is, in the past when I received Jesus Christ as my personal Savior, I was saved—saved forever from the penalty of sin. And, I shall be saved—one day when I go to Heaven—from the possibility of sin. But, I am being saved right now from the power of sin. And, that's what James is talking about. He's not talking about going to Heaven one day when he says, "*...receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls*" (James 1:21). But, he's saying you receive The Word of God that is able to deliver your psyche. That's what the Greek word soul is, *psyche*, your mind, your emotion and your will. He's saying that The Word of God is able to sanctify you. That's what he's talking about when he says, "The Word of God is able to save your soul." He's not talking here, primarily, about having your sins forgiven in the past, or going to Heaven in the future. But, he's talking about that The Word of God, right now, will be able to give you deliverance—the saving of your mind, your emotion, your will—your deliverance from the power, and pollution of sin, right now.

The same thing is taught—look in Psalm 19 for a moment. You may want to just jot it down along side this verse, but let's turn to it because I want to read a little extended passage from Psalm 19. Beginning in verse 7, and there again you get the idea—the delivering, saving power of The Word of God. Psalm 19 and verse 7: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul," again the psyche. "*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the*

judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward” (Psalm 19:7–11). Oh, my friends, if you could only understand the power of this book that’s able to deliver your souls.

Let me tell you a personal testimony. Do you know what keeps Adrian going day after day? It is not my emotions. I’m not a particularly emotional person. I have a rather stable emotion system. I don’t get too high. I see some of you folks, that you get all charged up, and you want to shout, and cry, and weep, and hallelujah, and praise the Lord, and I think that’s wonderful that you do. But, I see some of those same folks dragging bottom, way down here. Boy, they just get about as low—they could sit on a curb and dangle their feet—the same people that have been up here shouting and praising the Lord. They’re sort of manic-depressives, they go up, and they go down. They have that kind of a testimony. Well, I don’t do that, I just kind of stay in the middle. I don’t get too low, and I don’t get too high. And, I just kind of—now I don’t take credit for that. I don’t even think that’s good, I don’t think that’s bad, I just think that’s me. That’s just the temperament that God has given me. I just kind of stay in that narrow band. That’s the way I am. And, I don’t necessarily get my charge, and my impetus from emotion. The thing that keeps me going is not how I feel, it is what I know. It is truth, that has been through the years, the thing that keeps me.

Friend, there is power in The Word of God. If you want to be a successful, vibrant Christian—and I don’t mean to imply by that I am, but I will say that anything good about me certainly would be due to this fact. If you want to be victorious in your Christian life, then you must—you must—you must stay in The Word of God. The law of the Lord is perfect—converting the soul—received with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to deliver your psyche, your mind, your emotion, your will to keep you going.

There is no way—there is no way, underscore, emphasize it, exclamation point—there is no way that you’re going to be victorious apart from receiving this book. And, the reason that so many people are anemic is they have never learned to receive the engrafted word which is able to deliver their psyche, which is able to save their souls.

Now, look at that word receive. There are two Greek words that are translated receive. One of them is *lambano*, lambano, which means to simply “take out and grasp.” Just to reach out and take, and receive to yourself. That’s not the word that’s used here. That means that a person, by self-prompting, could just reach out and take and receive something. That would apply to someone who, for example, goes into the classroom and reaches into the chemistry book, and by his own ingenuity, and by his own skill he just reaches into that book and takes some truth out. The word *lambano* would describe that kind of a receiving, that kind of a taking, that sort of acquiring comes through study.

But, here the Bible uses a different word to receive. It is the word *dechomai*, which means “to welcome.” Not to reach out and take, but to open and receive, to welcome The Word. And, therefore we’ll call our message tonight, “Welcoming The Word.” That’s what he says, “receive with meekness.” He’s not saying just to reach out and take The Word, because you’ll never get it that way.

You know, that’s the problem, sometimes a man goes to seminary and he thinks, “Well now, if I’ve got a good mind, and I’ve got a well-stocked library, and I’ve got a good sharp pencil, and a pair of eye glasses, and I’ll just go with this book, and I’ll study this book, and boy, I’ll learn what it’s all about.” I want to tell you something, mister, you can backslide with a Bible under your arm, and don’t you forget it. You can backslide in seminary just as quick as you can anywhere else, because you are not going to go in and reach in, and pull it out. No, no, not lambano—dechomai. You’re going to have to open your heart, and welcome The Word. You’re going to have to receive The Word of God as you would receive a friend into your house.

I. Welcome the Word with Repentance

Now, tonight I want to tell you three ways to welcome The Word, to receive The Word. At least, I want to let James tell us. First of all, you are to welcome The Word with repentance. If a guest is coming to your house, one of the first things that you ought to do is clean the house, and certainly it is true that if we want The Word of God to dwell in us richly, and abound unto all fruitfulness, then we must welcome The Word with repentance.

Look at verse 21: “*Wherefore, lay aside all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness...*” (James 1:21). Now, let’s look at that word filthiness. This word *filthiness*, the Greek word *rhupos*, literally it’s a medical term, and it refers to “wax in the ear”—that which keeps you from hearing. You see, sometimes there are certain things that are in our spiritual ears that need to be removed so that we can hear.

I heard about a man, and somebody came up to him and said, “Say, you’ve got a carrot in your ear.” He said, “Huh?” He said, “You’ve got a carrot in your ear.” He said, “Huh?” He said, “You’ve got a carrot stuck in your ear.” He said, “I can’t hear you, I’ve got a carrot in my ear.”

Now, it seems that God is trying to tell us there’s something wrong with us, but we can’t hear him because the very thing that’s wrong with us is keeping us from hearing him tell us that it is wrong with us. And, we’re not going to be able to receive The Word until we take that out of our ears that which is stopping up our ears. And, that’s the word *filthiness* here. It refers to that which stops up the ears, that keeps you from hearing.

Now, remember this morning that we said that you’re to be swift to hear, swift to hear The Word of God. But, the reason that some of us don’t hear is there’s some

filthiness in our spiritual ears that clog up our ears. And, then look at that other word, “superfluity of naughtiness,” look at that in verse 21. This word *superfluity* of course, is very kin to our word *superfluous*. It means “that which remains,” that’s literally what it means, that which is left over. I guess the best description we could give this would be a hangover sin, of that which is left. You see, people are saved, they’re born again, they’ve received the Lord Jesus Christ, their sins are forgiven, and yet there seems to be sort of a hangover sin that comes over from the old life. The Bible calls that superfluous, or superfluity of naughtiness.

Let me give you an example of that. Do you remember when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead? And, Jesus stood at the tomb of Lazarus—there in John chapter 11—and Jesus said, “*Lazarus, come forth*” (John 11:43), and Lazarus came forth. But, boys and girls, he came forth like a mummy. He was just all wrapped up in the grave clothes. It must have been something to see ol’ Lazarus come out of that grave like that. He was wrapped round, and round, and round, and round like a cocoon. In the grave clothes, that’s the way they would bury a person—just wrap them in linen—round, and round, and round, he could hardly move. He had life, but he didn’t have liberty. And, Jesus said, “*Loose him, and let him go*” (John 11:44). That is, take off that superfluity of naughtiness. He has life, but there’s certain grave clothes that are still clinging to him. Get rid of those.

Or, again you think of the prodigal son as he comes. He says, “*I will arise and go to my father and say unto him, ‘Father, I’ve sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and I’m no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants’ And, while he was yet a great way off his father saw him, and had compassion, ran and fell on his neck and kissed him, and said, ‘Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and a ring on his hands and shoes on his feet’*” (Luke 15:18–22). That is, the prodigal son came with the old filthy clothes, of the old life, and he had to lay that aside, those hangover sins.

Now, he came to the father, but he still had some hangover sins, as it were. Now, I wonder, is there a part of that old life—I’m talking to you. Some of you who are saved, but you’re still wearing the old filthy grave clothes. You’re still wearing the smock that you wore in the hog pen. You’re still you—there’s certain things in your life, there’s certain spiritual wax in your ears, and certain unclean garments. You’re not ready to receive The Word.

Listen, friend do you want the Bible to speak to you? Do you want the Bible to be alive to you? Would you really like to welcome The Word? You want to get something out of your Bible study? I know, no way that you can do it unless you’re willing to repent of that filthiness, and superfluity of naughtiness.

Listen to what James says, “*Wherefore lay aside all filthiness and superfluity of*

naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your soul" (James 1:21). "Well," you say, "Brother Rogers, it's not all that bad, just a little sin." There are no little sins. We think they're little.

*Who is knocks so loud?
Just a lonely little sin.
"Slip through" I answered.
And, soon all hell was in.*

You see, friend, one sin, no matter how small we may deem it, opens the door for other sins. Do you want The Word of God to burst aflame in your hand? Would you like to read this book and have it come into you, just as you open your heart and receive a friend? Then, listen to what James says, "Lay aside all filthiness, and superfluity of naughtiness and receive with meekness."

Have you ever heard people sing: "Fill my cup, Lord, I lift it up, Lord"? And, they keep singing but their cup never gets filled. You want me to tell you why? They're singing the wrong song. They ought to be singing, "Cleanse my cup, Lord, I messed it up, Lord."

And, when that cup gets clean, then God will fill it. They're ready to receive The Word. Now, you receive The Word first of all with repentance.

II. Receive the Word with Readiness

Secondly, not only should you receive The Word with repentance, but receive The Word with readiness, with readiness. Look again in verse 21: "*Wherefore lay aside all filthiness, and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word*" (James 1:21). Look at that word *meekness*. Do you know what that meekness means? It means "a compliant spirit," a ready spirit, ready to obey.

You see, the reason that some of us don't get anything from the Bible is we don't have a meek spirit. Now, you need to understand what meekness is. Meekness is not weakness. Moses was the meekest man that ever lived, the Bible says. And, certainly Moses wasn't a weak man. Moses was the commander in chief of a great army, a very powerful figure. But, Moses had meekness. The word meekness means *teachability, trainability, controllability*.

In the olden days when they would take a horse, a wild stallion, and want to put a saddle on that stallion so he could be ridden, they would take a person who was trained in breaking horses. Now, that person wouldn't cripple or hobble that horse, but he would get on that horse time and again, until finally the horse learned to run with a rider on its back and obey the pull of the bridle. And, when that was done, they said the horse had been made meek, the horse had been meeked. That is, he is now teachable, he is now guidable, he is now controllable.

Are you teachable? Are you? Do you know why some folks don't really understand The Word of God? Because when God's Word says something, they parade it past the jury of their mind. And, The Word of God says, "ABC," and they say, "Let me see, A B C, does that sound right? Yea, I believe A, not so sure about B, yea, C is all right. Well, let me see, what about that B?" And, they try to figure it out, you see. They're not teachable. They think that, really they are the sum total of it. And, that somehow that it has to agree with them, and they parade it past their mind, rather than just simply receiving The Word of God.

Oh, my friend, do you want to learn from The Word? Jesus said in John 7:17: *"If any man will do God's will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God..."* (John 7:17). Some folks are stubborn, and that's the reason they don't welcome The Word, they don't receive The Word. They're like that man who said, "I'm open to conviction, I'd just like to see the man who could convict me." They're just really stubborn. Now, if you would receive The Word, you must receive it with repentance. That is, you must be clean. You must receive it with meekness—that is, you must be broken, ready to do the will of God. Repentance and readiness.

III. Receive the Word with Responsiveness

Now, thirdly, if you would welcome The Word, you must receive The Word with responsiveness, with responsiveness. Look again here in The Word of God now, in verse 22: *"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves"* (James 1:22). How terrible, how horrible, for a person to be deceived. But, doubly horrible and ironic it is that a man would deceive his own self.

Now, you see, if you do not respond to what you claim to have received and welcomed, you're a fool, and you have fooled yourself. You're self-deceived. You say, "Brother Rogers, you ought not to call people a fool." Well, then let's let Jesus do it. Jesus said, in Matthew, chapter 7 and verse 26: *"A man is like a foolish man who hears these words of mine, and will not do them. He's like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand"* (Matthew 7:26). And, Jesus says, "He's a foolish man who does that." He is a self-deceived man.

Do you know what's wrong with some of you folks? Listening to sermons, that's wrong with you. You've got a notebook full of sermons, and you've got a tape library full of sermons, but you have no more intention of obeying what you hear from this pulpit than you have what you watched last night on television. It's a kind of a little hobby with you—of taking truth, but not responding to that truth. You become a hearer of the word without becoming a doer of the word, and then you are self-deceived. And, that is so dangerous, because a man who is self-deceived gets himself into a trap that he can hardly get out of. It's not enough for you to go away raving about the music, and

bragging about the sermon. That's really no compliment. If you want to compliment my preaching, then live by The Word of God that I preach. That's the compliment. *"be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only"* (James 1:22).

I believe it was Peter Lord who said, "What we really believe, we live by. The rest is just religious talk." You want me to give you a test as to whether or not you're receiving The Word? Are you ready to take that test? Is your knowledge of the Bible making you more like Jesus Christ? That's a simple test. Is your knowledge of the Bible making you more like Jesus Christ?

You see, we're to receive The Word with repentance, a clean heart, with readiness, meekness, willingness to do it. And, then with responsiveness—we're to be doers of The Word and not hearers only. How are we to respond? Well, I want you to look in verses 23 and 24. James gives us a great example of what he's talking about. He says, *"For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass"* (James 1:23). That's the face you were born with, your natural face. You know, sometimes when they bury a person they say, "Don't he look natural?" That's your natural face. And, you've got it, you're stuck with it. I wish I could encourage you. Beauty's only skin deep, but ugly goes all the way to the bone. Beauty fades but ugly holds it's on. That's your natural face. Your natural face. And, he's like a man beholding his natural face in a glass, Paul says, but then in verse 24: *"For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed"* (James 1:24–25).

Now, in verses 23 and 24 he uses a word, *behold*, and this word behold means "a casual glance," a person who beholds his face in a mirror. He's like a person who wakes up in the morning, and his beard is grown out, his hair is tussled, he's got bags under his eyes, and he's still got soup on his mustache from last night. And, he goes and he looks in the mirror, and he glances in, he looks at himself for a moment, and agrees that he needs to put his face in shape. But, then he just—after a fleeting glance—he goes his way, and goes off to work looking like something Kaiser made when Frasier wasn't looking. And, he just goes that way to work. He forgets what he saw in the mirror. He just glances in the mirror for just a moment, and that's all—there's no change, there's no bathing, there's no shaving, there's no combing. He's just like he was, same fellow—glanced in the mirror for just a second, saw it and forgot it.

Now, that's the first word for *behold*, that's right there. Now, there are two different words that are used here in these verses. The first one means "a casual glance." The other means "a careful gaze."

Now, look in verse 25. It says, *"But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty..."*

(James 1:25). Compare that now, you may not see it in the King James, but it's there. Look in verse 23: "...a man beholding..." (James 1:23), and then in verse 25: "a man looking into..." (James 1:25). Beholding means a casual glance. *Looking into* means a *careful gaze*. This word that's translated here in verse 25: "looking into" is the same word that's found in John chapter 20 and verse 5. And, it speaks of the disciple John looking into the empty tomb. He's coming there, and he believes that Jesus may have been raised from the dead. He's not quite sure, and he bends over and he peers into the darkness, and intently, with his eyes set, searching, trying to see everything that he can see. He looks steadfastly.

Now, that's the way you're to look into The Word. Not just a casual glance, but a steadfast, careful, gazing into The Word, and a careful examination of The Word. And, then after an examination of The Word, an application of The Word. Look into it, pick it up, read it, study it, scrutinize it.

So many of us have—sort of—a little Brylcreem type of devotions: "A little dab'll do ya." And, we just get in there, and we read a little verse, and we've got our daily bread, or we've got some little ol' book of devotions. Nothing wrong with those, they're all right for just a little knick-knack, a little snack, like a saltine cracker, that's all right. But, oh my dear friend, when are you going to get this book down, and peer into to it, and look into it, and gaze into it, and study it. No wonder The Word of God is not real to you! And, when it's not real to you, no wonder you're not victorious in your Christian life. You're to look into it intently, not a casual glance.

And, then when you see what The Word of God tells you, when The Word of God like a mirror reflects back that image that you see, then you're to go about putting your life in order. Don't forget what manner of man you were. You're to change your way of living, and when you do that The Word of God will become a blessing.

Conclusion

Let me tell you something friend—and where did the time go? Let me tell you something, and I'm just going to do something very remarkable, brother Lane. I want to get an A-plus for this sermon, I'm going to quit in about two minutes and I got ten minutes of preaching.

All right, listen—listen—friend, you want to understand The Word of God? Let me tell you one of the grandest truths I've ever learned about prayer, and it's this: The prayer that gets to Heaven is the prayer that starts in Heaven.

Now, let me tell you a great truth that I've learned about Bible study. The way to understand the part of the Bible you don't understand is to obey the part you do understand. Now, that's simple, isn't? You look at it, and when He shows you something, then you obey that. And, my friend, if you've done that, you have welcomed

The Word.

Now, there are three ways that we can welcome The Word and verse 26 speaks of the control of the tongue. Verse 27 speaks of care for the troubled. And, verse 27 also speaks of the cleanliness of our testimony. If we had time, we'd talk about it, but we don't. Let's bow in prayer.

The Word of God as a Mirror

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: November 30, 1988

Main Scripture Text: James 1:22–25

Sponsored by: Sponsor

“For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass.”

JAMES 1:23

Outline

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Introduction

Now tonight, would you take God’s Word and turn please to the Book of James, chapter 1. And, when we have an ordination service, generally I try to put an emphasis upon the Word of God. Craig, you have a deep and abiding confidence in the Word of God. And I want to speak to you tonight about God’s Word as a mirror.

Now I think that most of you, before you came to church, stopped by the mirror and you looked in. A few, I think maybe you didn’t, but most of you, you stopped by the mirror and you looked in before you go out in public or you get here. And the wind’s blowing. You go in and check yourself just a little bit. Now I want us to check ourselves tonight in God’s mirror, the Word of God.

James chapter 1 and verse 22. Here’s a command. “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only; deceiving your own selves. But if any man be a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man beholding his natural face in a glass.” That is, he’s like a man looking at his physical features in a mirror. “For he beholdeth himself and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty (that’s just a synonym for the Word of God), the perfect law of liberty (and isn’t that a beautiful phrase, the law of liberty?) and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”

Now the Bible is so marvelous and so rich and so has so much variegated splendor

in all that it says and does and is that there are many emblems and many symbols for the Word of God.

Jeremiah said the Word of God is like a hammer. David said the Word of God is like a lamp. Moses said the Word of God is like bread. The writer of the Book of Hebrews said the Word of God is like a sharp sword. Jesus said the Word of God is like a seed. James says that the Word of God is like a mirror. I want us to think of two passages tonight that speak of the Word of God as a mirror. And then, I want us to see what kind of application we can get from that.

I. We See Ourselves Reflected

First of all, in the Word of God, because it's a mirror, I see myself reflected. You see, not only do I read this Book; this Book reads me. This Book has a picture of me. And if I want to see me, I just simply look into the Word of God.

I heard of one man who said, "I don't know why it is. I, I can't get a better picture of myself." He'd been to many photographers. Somebody said, "Well, if you want to know why just go look in the mirror."

Now the mirror doesn't lie. The mirror is very brut, brutal. The photographers sometimes lie because they know how to use the lighting effects and the shadows and all of that. And they have a motto, "When there's beauty, we take it; where there's none, we make it." But the mirror, the mirror doesn't do that. Mirrors are very brutal.

I heard of a man, an old fellow, who lived so far back out in the woods. He'd never even seen a mirror. And he finally found one. He was a grown man. And he looked at it, and he said, "Well, glory be. There's a picture of my old pappy." And he was so proud of it. He took it up and put it in the attic. His wife saw him up there in the attic. And she, being quite nosey, went up there afterward, and she found it, and looked at it. And she said, "So that's the old hag he's been running around with." Now mirrors don't lie.

James has in his mind two imaginary people, two people who have a mirror. And they hold it up and they look at it. One man takes, what I'm going to call a casual glance. The other man takes a concentrated gaze.

A. A Casual Glance

Now look at the man who takes a casual glance here if you will, as we look in verse 23: "If any man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like a man beholding his natural face in a glass." Now this word, beholding, has the idea of a person who is just simply glancing into the Word of God. He gets up in the morning. He's in a hurry. He just runs past the mirror. And then he's gone. And he's really forgotten what he saw. Now we do that a lot. Have you ever looked at your watch casually and then immediately forgot what time it was? I think we all do that. We, we just kind of glance at the Word of God. I believe that a lot of what people call morning devotions is that kind of

a glance. We open the book. We glance in it. We say, "I've done my duty." A dose a day keeps the devil away. And then, we're on our way, but we have not really looked into the Word of God. We take only a snatch look in the Book.

Now we don't pause. One of the reasons we don't pause many times is we don't really want to see. We're like a gnat just kind of bouncing around from place to place, rather than being like a bee that pauses at a flower and just extracts that honey and draws out the nectar.

Now God doesn't reveal much truth to the people who do that, who just glance. They, they just bounce in and out of the Word of God. Many times, you, if you ask a so-called reader of the Bible what book of the Bible he read out of, he couldn't tell you to save his life. He just sort of does a lucky dip. If you were to ask him what it says, he really, ten minutes after he read it, he couldn't tell you. If you, if you were to ask him what it meant to him, he, if he were honest, he would say very little, if anything. That's just sort of the casual glance.

B. **A Careful Gaze**

But then, there's another man that looks into the Word of God, Craig, and this is the person with the careful gaze. Now look again, and he uses different description here. He speaks of a person here in verse 25: "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." Now here this word, *looketh into the perfect law of liberty*, the word *look* is a very interesting word. It means literally to, to peer into something, to look, to scrutinize, to look intently.

Now, if you were the first one at the empty tomb on Easter morning had you been there and the stone had been rolled away, and you had a chance to look inside, would you look casually? No. I mean, your eyes would be big as saucers if you had a chance to look into that tomb and you would watch for every detail. That's exactly what happened. The Bible describes him in John 20, verse 5: "And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; and yet he went not in." Now the Bible has the idea (watch this) he's stooping down, he looks into that tomb. He is, he is peering into the darkness. He is concentrating on whatever is there or is not there.

Now that's the word that is used here, which means, the person who has that careful gaze. Again, it's mentioned in 1 Peter chapter 1, I think, about verse 12, where it speaks of the prophecies and things that the angels couldn't understand. And then, it says there were things that the angels desired to look into. I mean, the angels really wanted to know about our salvation that was prophesied in the Old Testament. And so they pondered. They looked into the Word of God.

I want to submit to you, Craig and Robin and everybody else on this platform, and certainly to my own self, that we need to do more than just take a little spiritual

sandwiches out of the Word of God. We need to sit down and absorb the Word of God and look into the Word of God because it is the Word of God that is a mirror that reveals us.

Now I'm sure that all of us looked into a literal mirror today. But if you looked into a mirror and you saw something on your face, a smudge or dirt or smeared mascara or lipstick or disheveled hair, what would you do? Well, hopefully, if you looked into the mirror, you wanted to see whether you were right or wrong. And if you were wrong, you wanted to put what was wrong right.

Now, when you look into the Word of God, don't just forget what you see. When you read the Bible, the Bible reads you. And make a habit of writing down what things you need to correct and then, correct those things as you read the Word of God, and the Word of God will burst aflame in your heart and in your life.

For example, you look in a mirror, you see a dirty face, you say, "Well, I need to cleanse that face." Psalm 119, verse 9: "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto to thy word." When the Word condemns you, when the Word reveals that filth, whatever it is, take heed to it. Don't just read it and forget it. If you do, you're deceiving yourselves. And a self-deceived person is really deceived. Now, let's go back to Psalm 119, verse 9. Just don't turn to it, but listen to it.

"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word." The word *way* there is the word, ah, that means actually a rut. You know, sin has a way of putting a muddy rut in our lives. Sin has a way of putting a, a groove in your character. And many of us have lives that are like nine miles of bad road.

"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word." Jesus said in John 15, verse 3: "You're clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." And that word *clean* is the word we get our word catharsis from. The Word of God does, doesn't just cleanse us outwardly. It gives a catharsis as it flows through us, as the cleansing tides of Calvary and the breezes of the Holy Spirit blow through our lives. So, when I look into the perfect law of liberty, first of all, I see myself reflected. If I don't take a casual glance, but if I take a careful gaze, I'm going to see Adrian and then I'm going to do something about it. Keep that in your mind. Then I want you to turn to another passage.

I want you to turn to 2 Corinthians this time, chapter 3 and verse 18. Second Corinthians chapter 3 and verse 18. Now here again, God is speaking of the Bible as a mirror. This time it is not James, but it is Paul that is speaking, but both of them, inspired by the same Holy Spirit. Paul says, "But we all, with open face (that is, no veil over our face) beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." Now, when he says here, "...as in a glass..." he means as in a mirror.

II. We See Our Purpose

Now let me tell you what God's purpose is for you in the Word of God. Number one: To show you what you are by nature. And then, number two: To show you what you ought to be by grace. That's what the Bible is for. The Bible is to show you what you are, but also what you could be. Now God's purpose in the Word of God is to make you like the Lord Jesus Christ. God is so pleased with His Son, the Lord Jesus, He wants an entire race of people just like Him. And so, so what God is up to by the gospel of grace is making people in the image of God, which image was marred when Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden. But the Bible says, "Those whom he did foreknow, he predestinate to be conformed to his image." And so, we are destined to be like the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now God doesn't just wait till the rapture to start making you like the Lord Jesus Christ. God wants to make you like the Lord Jesus Christ today. He wants you to go from glory to glory. There are stages of glory. When you first get saved, that's glorious. But then, when you learn the ministry of the Holy Spirit, that's more glorious. When you learn death to self, that is more glorious. And God wants to lead you from glory to glory. That's what He says here in this verse. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory...."

Now, you say, "Now, wait a minute. When I look in the Bible, if the Bible is a mirror, who do I see in that mirror? Do I see me or Jesus?" Well, you're to see both. You're to see both. You see, when you got saved, you are a part of Jesus. And if you look in the Bible not only will you see what you are by nature, but you'll also see what you are by grace. You look over there in the mirror. You say, "That's not me. That's Jesus." And He says, "That's right, that's right." You're crucified with Christ. You're risen with Christ. Christ is in you, and you are in Christ. That's the reason why we're called Christians. A Christian is somebody like Jesus. And, really, you ought to look in that mirror and you ought to see the image of Jesus reflected on the other side.

Bunyan, in *Pilgrim's Progress*, wrote about this, and he had this in mind. Pilgrim, you know, who is the imaginary Christian, was given a mirror. This is what was written about that mirror. And I quote, "This looking glass was one in a thousand. It reflects the face of man one way with his exact features. Yet turned another way, the face of the prince of Pilgrim's himself." One way you see yourself. You behold your natural face, and you behold your spiritual face. And then, you look this way and you see the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to tell you, dear friend, according to 1 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 18, that God's plan for you is to be like Jesus.

Do you know the test of my ministry? Craig, do you know the test of your ministry? The test of my ministry is not that building out there. It's not the amount of our budget. It's not primarily how many we have in Sunday school or how well organized our church is. The test of my ministry is, are you people who are listening to me becoming more

like Jesus? That's the test of my ministry. Now, if you're not becoming more like Jesus, no matter what we do, I'm failing. That is the test of any ministry. You see, that is the purpose of the ministry of the Word of God. I am to hold this book up as a mirror and show you yourself. And then, I'm to hold this book up as a mirror and show you the Savior. Now, when you see yourself, that leads to confession and cleansing. But when you see Jesus Christ, that leads to cones, ah, consecration and it leads to sanctification. We become more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. We go from one level of glory to another. You see, the Bible mirrors Jesus. If you read the Bible and you don't see Jesus, you'd better re-read the Bible because He is there. Acts chapter 10, verse 43. The Bible says, "To him give all the prophets witness..." That is, all the Old Testament prophets wrote about Jesus. Don't get the idea that the New Testament takes up and starts with Jesus and the Old Testament was about Moses or law or the history of the Hebrews. Oh no. "To him (to Jesus) give all the prophets witness..." Jesus said, concerning the Old Testament, ah, "Ye search the Scriptures. These are they which testify of me." And on, and, and Luke, the twenty-fourth chapter, the Bible says, on the road to Emmaus when He walked with those two disciples after His resurrection, it says, "He showed them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." Boy, you know, I believe that it's not the Lord's will we had a, we have a tape recording of that, or we'd have it, but I sure would like one ha.

I mean, who would like to hear the Lord Jesus expound the Scriptures, beginning at Moses and the prophets and showing us all the things in the Old Testament concerning himself? Man, you talk about a Bible conference. I would love to have been on that road that day as the Lord Jesus revealed in all the Scriptures. It doesn't say He revealed in the Scriptures all the things concerning Himself. It says He revealed in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. That is, He's in all the Scriptures.

Now, you see, this book is a mirror. And when you look into that mirror, you see Jesus Christ reflected. Well, now what happens is this: As you keep looking into this book, you become like what you look at. Look again at this verse: "But we all with open face beholding as, as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed..." Do you see the word *changed*? The word *changed* there is the same word that is translated in Matthew chapter 17, verse 2 as transfigured. When Jesus was taken up on the Mount of Olives, ah, excuse me, on the Mount of Transfiguration (I don't know what mount it was. Some think it was Mount Herman, but an exceedingly great, high mountain), when He was up there, the Bible says He was transfigured. That's exactly the same word that's here in 2 Corinthians 3, verse 18. We are transfigured by reading the Bible.

Now what is a transfiguration? Well, the word *transfigured* and this word is the word we get our word *metamorphosis* from. Do you know what a metamorphoses is? That's what happens when that ugly caterpillar goes into the cocoon, the cocoon, and then

comes out a glorious butterfly. It goes through a metamorphosis or a change of form. Now a metamorphosis is not an outward change. It is a change that begins on the inside. That is, that that butterfly is already in that caterpillar insipiently and it just comes to the surface. When Jesus Christ... The Bible says that His face was like the sun, His clothes, His raiment white. There was a glorious shekinah glory about the Lord Jesus. Well, you know, that glory had been in the Lord Jesus all the time. That wasn't some glory that shone upon Him. That was glory that shone out from Him. Now a metamorphosis is simply when the inner nature comes to the surface. The inner nature of Jesus was glory and is glory. And so that inner nature of Jesus had been veiled by His flesh. But in this metamorphosis, in this transfiguration, that inner glory just came to the surface, and that's what they saw on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Now the same word is used here. It says we are changed from glory to glory. We also are transfigured. We also are to go through a metamorphosis. That is, as I look into the Word of God and begin to obey the Word of God, a change begins to take place in me. What is the inner nature of a Christian? It's Jesus! It's Jesus! He is in you. He is in you. He is your nature. He is your inner nature. Now, as you look into the Bible and you see Jesus in the Bible, then that inner nature of Jesus in you responds to what you see in the Bible, and you're changed from glory to glory. The more you look in the Word of God, the more you go through a metamorphosis. And the more that which is on the inside, the more you look into the Word of God, the more that which is on the inside comes to the surface.

The same thing is taught in Romans chapter 12, verse 1: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice....and be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Now the word *transform* there is the same word. Be metamorphized by the renewing of your mind. Well, how do you renew your mind? Looking into the Word! Looking into the Word of God. And as you look into the Word of God, then, then, then you begin to see the Lord Jesus, and there comes a sympathetic vibration, the Christ in the Word and in the Christ in the heart begin to work together, and you get to be changed. The Bible says you're changed from glory to glory as you look into the Word of God and see the Lord Jesus Christ reflected there. You look into the Word of God and you your sin and you see your unworthiness, as James says, and so, so you confess that. You don't forget what you are. You say, "God, I'm sorry of that." And you get cleansed and forgiven. And then, you go back to the Word of God and now you see the Lord Jesus. And you look at Jesus, and you contemplate Jesus, and you love Jesus. And the Bible says you are changed into the same image as you look into the mirror of God's Word from glory to glory. That is, you don't stop growing. You just go from one stage of glory to another stage of glory.

Do you remember the story of the ugly duckling? You remember that story? That little duckling, who was really a swan, didn't know he was a swan, and he got mixed up with a, what do you call it, a bunch of ducks. What do you call them? A gaggle of geese. What do you call a herd of ducks? Ha, ha. Sure, I've heard of ducks. What do you call a bunch of ducks? Flock! I knew that. I just seen if you knew that. All right, a flock of ducks. Here's this swan, this little baby swan. He gets in this flock of ducks. And he doesn't look like the rest of the ducks. And so they made fun of him. He was more clumsy than the other ducks. He had a strange appearance. And all the other ducks ridiculed him because of his strange and bizarre appearance. And he finally just cut out and went over to a house where they had some pets. And in that house they had a cat and they had a chicken. He didn't fit in there either. The cat wouldn't have anything to do with him because he couldn't purr, and the chicken 'cause he didn't lay eggs. They both ostracized him and so he went back to the pond again. And this ugly duckling, now you know this is not, this, this just fable. You know this, don't you? All right. This ugly duckling, when he was out there swimming around, he saw the most graceful and beautiful creatures he'd ever seen. He saw two beautiful swan. Oh, he thought they were absolutely magnificent. He couldn't take his eyes off them, off of them. And he thought to himself, *They are the most beautiful creatures I've ever seen.* He fell instantly in love with them, had a fascination, a fixation, on these swan. There was something inside of him that just vibrated when he saw them. And they took off from the pond and went on their migratory flight. The winter came. The ugly duckling kept growing. Then, the spring thaw came and the swans returned to the lake. You remember the story? The ugly duckling was out there, and he saw the swans coming, and this time they were coming right toward him. He was so humiliated because he felt he was so ugly. He didn't even want them to see him. He didn't feel worthy to be in their presence. And he bowed his head and tried to cover his face with his wings. And when he did, he looked down in the water and he saw a reflection of himself. And what he saw mirrored there was a swan. He realized that, indeed, his inner nature that he had not known was the nature of a swan. And the thing that he admired so much is what he had become.

Now you remember when you first saw the Lord Jesus, how humiliated you felt? I mean, when you really seen Him. And you say, "Oh, compared to Him, compared to Him, I'm nothing." But, my dear friend, I want you to know that you're going to be like Him. The psalmist said, "I shall be satisfied when I awaken in Thy likeness." And as you behold the Lord Jesus Christ, you are changed from glory to glory. And as the inner nature of that ugly duckling was not a duck, but a swan! And the inner nature of you, dear friend, is not the old Adam; it's the new Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to this verse: "But we all with open face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

When this ugly duckling saw what he was, he lifted his head up – not straight up like an ostrich, but with a gentle curve of humility, and that’s the way he swam from there on.

Now, my dear friend, there’s a principle. Did you know that we become like what we worship? It’s just a principle. If a man worships money, he’s going to become materialistic. Many people worship money. If a man worships power and prestige, he’s going to become hard and cold and callous. If he worships an idol, he’s going to become spiritual dead as a stone.

Let me give you one more verse and I’ll be finished. Look in Psalm 115 here for just a moment. I was looking at this while the little kids were singing there for a moment to see if that, indeed, is where it is, and it is. Psalm 115. Look with me in verse 4. The psalmist speaks of the idols of the heathen, and it says, “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not. They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat.” Now watch verse 8: “They that make them are like unto them....” At first the man molds the idol and then the idol molds the man. There’s a biblical principle – you become like what you worship.

Conclusion

Do you want to be a great Christian? God’s given you a mirror. Each morning, look in there and see what you look like. If you’ve got a dirty face, get clean. And then, continue to read. Not only see yourself, but see your Savior. Be finding Jesus in the Word of God, praising Him, worshipping Him, looking at Him. And you’re going to find out something’s going to happen in you – that inner nature, who is Jesus, is going to come to the surface. And you’re going to be more and more like your Lord. And that’s God’s purpose for you. And, Craig, that’s God’s, your purpose in the ministry – to make people see themselves and see their Savior in the Word of God. I have no greater joy than that, no greater joy than to take this book and help people to see themselves and to see their Savior. Just say, “There’s the mirror, folks. Have a look. Have a look in the Book.”

Let’s pray. Father, thank You for Your precious Word tonight. Thank You, Lord, that it’s a reliable and an accurate mirror where we can see a reflection of our sinful self. But, Oh, thank You, dear Lord, that that same book tells us how to be cleansed. And thank You, Lord, that we can see a reflection of our inner nature, the Lord Jesus, and as we continue to look, that we’ll be changed. Thank You for that. And help Craig and Robin in their ministry, Lord, to be holding up the mirror of Your Word constantly to people. In Jesus’ holy name, amen.

Superficial or Supernatural

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: July 16, 1978

Main Scripture Text: James 1:26–27

“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.”

JAMES 1:26

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Introduction

Your religion, is it superficial or is it supernatural? You’re going to find two kinds listed here in James chapter 1 beginning in verse 26: *“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world”* (James 1:26–27). James chapter 1, verses 26 and 27.

These are serious times in which we’re living, and I am convinced that we are facing one of three things: either the blackout and the annihilation of civilization as we know it; or the second coming of Jesus Christ; or else a global revival. One of three things. And, I pray God that we can see a global revival. And, there’s nothing in the scripture that says we cannot have a great spiritual awakening of gigantic proportions before our Lord comes, and there seems to be some straws in the wind. There seems to be a going in the tops of the mulberry bushes that tells us that God is up to something.

But, I want to say ladies and gentlemen, that we who are saved—we who are born again—need to be living and keeping with the urgency, and the emergency, of these

times. And, we need in our lives, and we need in our churches, and we need in our faith, a reality, real religion.

And, so we're talking today about real religion—not religion that is superficial—but religion that is supernatural. And, so our text today breaks itself very logically, and very easily in two divisions. First of all, I want you to see the dangers of superficial religion, and then secondly I want you to see the delights of supernatural religion.

I. The Dangers of Superficial Religion

Now, look at the scripture here. James chapter 1 and verse 26, and you will see the dangers of superficial religion. Look at verse 26: *"If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain"* (James 1:26).

A. It Lacks Reality

Three dangers of superficial religion are mentioned here. The first danger is that it lacks reality. It lacks reality. Look at it: "If any man among you seem to be religious."

Now, there are some many people who only have a form of godliness. They have a name that they live, but they are dead. And, their religion is only an illusion. It's only something that seems to be, but there is no reality to it, and there's nothing worse—mark it down—there's nothing worse than religion without reality. Oh, it ought to be real to you. It ought to be vibrant to you. You ought to have a know-so, not a hope-so or a maybe-so salvation. You ought to have a know-so salvation.

Too many Christians are like question marks when they ought to be exclamation points. Too many Christians are doubting Christians when they ought to be shouting Christians. Too many Christians are only seeming Christians when they ought to be sincere Christians. Too many Christians cannot say, *"...I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day"* (2 Timothy 1:12). For faith is a faith of a calm assurance. Now, I have Ms. Geraldine Smith over here who's amening me this morning. Where are you Geraldine? Right there, now. OK, we've heard from you. That's enough, I need to cool you down and warm them up. So, we thank God for her, we think God for her. She gets excited about these things, and some of you need to get excited about a know-so salvation.

Now, listen friend, your salvation, your salvation ought to have reality to it. It ought to have reality to it. You ought to say, "I know that I am saved." You see, James chapter 5, verse 13: *"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life..."* (1 John 5:13).

If you want sometime, something that's fun to do, get you a Bible that you don't mind marking—and by the way you shouldn't mind writing in any Bible. There's nothing wrong

with that. Some people think it's sacrilegious to write in the Bible. It's not. You take those Bibles and wear them out, and then get you another one and wear it out. And, brother, a Christian that has a Bible that's falling apart generally has a life that's not falling apart. And, you just take your Bible and every time you come to the word *know*—K-N-O-W—in 1 John, you just draw a circle around it. Take a red pen and draw T word—*know, know, know, know, know*—over, and over, and over again. Oh, there is to be the assurance of your salvation.

But, the problem with so many people is their salvation lacks reality. They don't know that they have been born again. Have you been born again? If you have, you ought to know it. It ought to be just as real—it ought to be just as real as your first birth. Will Rogers, one time, went to apply for a passport, and they asked him for his birth certificate. He said, "What do you want my birth certificate for?" They said, "For proof of your birth." He said, "Well, I'm here, ain't I?" That ought to be proof enough.

Oh, listen friend, it ought to be just as real to you as your first birth. Someone asked Dwight L. Moody, one of the greatest evangelists who's ever lived, "Mr. Moody, what is the secret of your evangelistic success? Give me, if you would please, a resume of your career." And, these are the words of Dwight L. Moody. Here's how Moody answered that man. He said, "My name is Dwight L. Moody. I was born the first time in 1837. I was born the second time in 1856. My body is soon to die, but my spirit born two times is immortal." That's all he said. Oh, how real the second birth was to Dwight L. Moody. He knew that he'd been born again.

The problem with superficial religion is that it lacks reality. There was a man, a church member, whose name was Mr. H. L. Cox, and he'd been a member of the church for years. But, he did not have that calm assurance that the choir spoke about awhile back. One day he made up his mind, I can take it no longer. I'm tired of playing church. I am tired of an illusion. My soul demands reality, and he found it in the Lord Jesus Christ and then he wrote this song.

*Oh, how well do I remember how I doubted day by day,
For I did not know for certain that my sins were washed away;
When the Spirit tried to tell me, I would not the truth receive;
I endeavored to be happy and to make myself believe.
But, then I prayed to God in earnest, and not caring what men said;
I was hungry for the blessing; my poor soul, it must be fed;
Then at last by faith I touched Him, and like sparks from smitten steel,
Just so quick salvation reached me Oh, bless God, I know it's real!
But, it's real; it's real, I know it's real,
Praise God, the doubts are settled,
For I know, I know it's real. (H. L. Cox)*

Can you say that? I trust that you can. The problem with superficial Christianity—superficial religion—is that it lacks reality. It is but an illusion. Notice what James said, “If any man seem to be religious.” Do you just simply seem to be religious, or have you, my friend, been born again?

B. It Lacks Restraint

Now, let me say secondly, not only does superficial religion lack in reality. It also is lacking in restraint. Look again at verse 26: “*If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue...*”—who cannot restrain his own tongue—“*then that man’s religion is vain*” (James 1:26). What is James saying? James is so very practical. James says, “If you have been saved, if you have been born again, if your religion is real, it’s going to show in the way that you talk.”

James has so much to say about the tongue, and we preached last week about what James said about the tongue. And, now again James is speaking about the tongue, and you’re going to find out in the second chapter he’s going to have a whole heap to say about the tongue, so don’t relax yet.

I want to say, ladies and gentlemen, that one of the prime marks that a person has been born again is his speech pattern. You’re going to find an individual who’s been born again praising God, and witnessing. And, you’re going to find the person who’s not been born again, you’re going to find him criticizing, and carping, and you’re going to find him cursing, and you’re going to find him lying, and you’re going to find him exaggerating. And, James has so much to say about the tongue. And, little wonder that he has.

I’ve been a pastor now for twenty-six years, and I have known people whose two-inch tongues were doing more damage than a wrecking crew, and some of them members of the church. They have a tongue that’s loose on both ends and hinged in the middle. And, yet they claim to be born again. They claim to be saved. Nothing can do more damage to the cause of Christ, and the glory of our Lord, than people who seem to be religious and yet they don’t bridle their tongue. Many of us know people like that. Some of them claim to be big church workers. Some of them parading up and down the aisles of churches, but yet there is no restraint in their mouth. And, the reason that James warns against this is because it lacks in reality, “*...for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*” (Matthew 12:34).

I heard of a woman who was a great church worker, at least she thought that she was, but she was one of these loose tongued women, and she wanted to impress her pastor. It’s one of these old-fashioned churches where they had a kneeling bench called an altar. And, she came forward, and she took the pastor by the hand and she said, “Pastor, I want to lay my tongue on the altar.” He said, “Well, sister, it’s only 24 feet

long, but you can try it.”

James is very practical. James was sort of a hard-nosed pastor. And, James said, *“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue... this man's religion is vain”* (James 1:26). And, I want to warn you—I don't care whose church that you're a member of, and I don't care how many times you've been baptized—if you are a peddler of profanity, if you are a lover of lies, if you are a hurter of hurts, if you are a trader in trash, if you are a fondler of filth, then you need to be born again. Your religion is vain.

Now, this is not the only area where we need restraint, but James uses the tongue as an illustration of the fact that when a man is saved, it changes his life. We said last week, and I'll say again, if your religion has not changed your life, you better change your religion. Because, you don't have the kind that saves.

C. It Lacks in Results

Now, James is speaking about the dangers of superficial religion. And, he says number one: it lacks reality. Number two: it lacks restraint, it has no power to change a life. And, then thirdly, it lacks in results. Look at it again, verse 26: *“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain”* (James 1:26). Look at that word *vain*. That word *vain* means *fruitless, non-productive*, and “exercise in futility.” You're simply spinning your wheels. This religion can do you no good. It lacks in results. There is nothing to it. The sum total is nothing. It's like a zero with the edges trimmed off. It is nothing, no good, and a waste of time.

So many people think there's value in religion. Every now and then someone will stand up and say what we need is more religion in America. Not necessarily so. Most of the people in America are religious, but lost. They need to turn from religion to Jesus Christ. Religion can be vain, empty, vapid, of no good whatever, it lacks in results.

One minister was trying to win a young man to faith in Jesus Christ, to have this young man born again. And, this young man looked at that minister and said, “It won't do you any good to talk to me.” He said, “I have tried religion for five years and it did me no good whatever.” And, the minister smiled and said, “I know what you mean, I tried religion for 15 years and it did me no good either, and I finally gave it up.” And, the man said, “You did, then why are you a minister?” He said, “Because I found Jesus Christ.”

I want to tell you that Christianity is not just one more religion. It is a vital relationship with a person. When you get saved, you receive Jesus Christ. He comes into you. His Spirit lives in you. He changes you from the inside. Religion is simply the outward expression of what's on the inside. And, dear friend, if you don't have Christ on the inside, then your religion is superficial. If you have Christ on the inside, then your

religion is supernatural.

When you got married, you didn't get the marriage religion. You got your wife or your husband. When you get saved you don't merely get the Christian religion, you get Jesus Christ. Jesus comes into you. Oh, the dangers, the dangers of superficial religion. The worst thing about superficial religion is that people who have it don't even know they have it. They deceive their own hearts. They are religious, but lost. They go to church on Sunday's, they pay their tithe, they sing in the choir, they do all of this and when they die, there are going to Hell. The devil had just as soon send you to Hell from this pew as he had the gutter. It makes no difference to him. The devil doesn't mind you being religious, so long as you don't have Jesus Christ. And, I want to remind you that it was a religious crowd that nailed Jesus Christ to the cross. Religion does not save, Jesus saves. It is a vital relationship, a new birth.

Have you been born again? Does God's Spirit bear witness with your spirit? Has your religion reality? Does it have restraint? Does it show results? Oh, the dangers of superficial religion. People who are members of the church. I want to tell you that people are going to Hell surrounded by receipts from church offerings, Sunday School attendance records, and baptismal certificates, because they have never, ever met Jesus Christ in reality. They've never been born again.

II. The Delights of Supernatural Religion

Now, James—very practical, and very plain, and very pungently, and powerfully—James speaks of the dangers of superficial religion. And, then James speaks of the delights of supernatural religion.

A. It Reaches Upward to God

Notice how James contrasts the two. Now, he speaks in verse 27, look at it, in verse 27: "*Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless*"—that is orphans—"*and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world*" (James 1:27). Now, here's James' first description of supernatural religion, "pure religion and undefiled," and it is in three dimensions. Look at it. First of all, it reaches upward: "*Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this...*" It reaches upward to Heaven. It reaches upward to God. It recognizes God as Father.

Now, friend, there's only one way to have God as your Father, and that is to have Christ as your Savior so that you're born again. Contrary to popular opinion, God is not the Father of everyone. We hear people today talk in glowing terms about the universal Fatherhood of God, and the universal brotherhood of men. But, there is nothing in the Bible that teaches the universal Fatherhood of God, and the universal brotherhood of

men. God is only the Father of those who have been born again. God is only the Father of those who have been saved, those who have received the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

Jesus said to the unsaved Pharisees in John chapter 8, verse 44: *“You are of your father the devil, and the lust of your father ye will do...”* (John 8:44). The Bible says in John 1:12, concerning the Lord Jesus: *“He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him”—as many as received Jesus—“to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name”* (John 1:11–12). Look friend, in verse 18 of this chapter, in verse 18 of James 1. Here James speaks of the new birth: *“Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth...”*—of whose own will? Of God’s own will—*“begat he us”—fathered He us—“with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures”* (James 1:18).

Here James speaks of the new birth, begotten of God through The Word of God. Through the preaching of The Word of God, when a man hears this Word, believes this Word, receives this Word, is transformed by this Word, he is born again, *“not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever”* (1 Peter 1:23). You see, real religion, real religion reaches upward. That’s the only way you can reach. You can’t put your hands under your feet and lift yourself off the ground. You can’t lift yourself by your own bootstraps.

Down in Florida, south of Lake Okeechobee, two college students were going along looking for parasitic plants. They were on some sort of a research expedition. They were walking there along the shores of a sandy stream, south of Lake Okeechobee in my home state. Now, there was a man named Mr. Jack Thicket—and a Fred Stall—were walking along. Thicket was in front, and Thicket said to Stall, who was behind him, “Stay back here, the ground is soft.” Thicket had been walking on the crusty sand, but his feet went through, and he was in sand down to his ankles. He said that, “You stay back,” and Thicket tried to take a couple of more steps to get on solid ground, but when he did, he sank even deeper, this time down to his knees. He said to Stall, “I believe this is quicksand.” He said, “I’ll stay here, you go get a branch or something to pull me out.”

And, Stall went off to look for some sort of a branch, or some sort of a limb to help him out, but Thicket panicked and he began to struggle and try and get himself from that quicksand, and when he did he sank down up to his thighs. And, then he lost his balance and fell forward, and plunged his hands into that sand. He began to scream. Finally Stall came back with a branch and said, “Take hold of this and I’ll pull you out.” He said, “I can’t get my hands out of the sand.” Stall said, “You must try.” And, the more he tried, and the more he struggled, the deeper he sank. Stall didn’t know what to do. He knew he couldn’t go near. And, finally, as Thicket whimpered and cried, Stall buried his face in his hands and prayed, and when he looked up where Thicket used to be was

just the level sand. He was gone.

What he needed was someone above him, someone who was on solid footing that could reach down and lift him out. My friend, I want to tell you that this is the way every man in this world is. He is in a morass, a quicksand of sin, and there is no way that he can work himself out, and the harder you struggle the deeper you sink. And, that's the reason we sing:

*From sinking sand he lifted me,
with his own hand, he lifted me. (Charles H. Gabriel)*

That's the reason the psalmist said: *"He brought me up out of a miry pit, he hath set my feet upon a rock, he's put a song in my mouth"* (Psalm 40:2–3).

There is, dear friend, the supernatural aspect of this religion that reaches upward. And, we've placed our hand in the hand of God. For the Bible says, *"For by grace are ye saved through faith"* (Ephesians 2:8). Grace is God reaching down to you. Faith is your reaching up to God. And, when your hand of faith meets God's hand of grace, that's salvation.

I want to tell you something about real religion friend—supernatural religion—it reaches upward. It is before God and the Father. It begins recognizing God as Father, being born again of The Word of God. Have you been born again?

Jesus told Nicodemus—a better man than any man in this congregation, outwardly, morally—that he had to be born again. And, I don't care how many degrees you have after your name. Nicodemus was a master of Israel. He had an M.I., but he didn't have a B.A., he hadn't been born again. Have you been born again? Have you? Wonderful, if you have. But, if you've not been born again, the day will come when you wished you had never been born at all.

B. It Reaches Outward

You see, if you're born twice, you can die but once. But, if you're born once, you must die twice. The first death, and then the second death, which is the lake of fire. What about the delights of supernatural religion? It reaches upward, but not only does it reach upward, it reaches outward. Look in verse 27 again: *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction..."* (James 1:27). When a man has been transformed, when a man has been saved, when a man has been born again, it is going to give to that man a heart of compassion. He's going to reach out to those in distress.

Now, James is not saying, by any stretch of the imagination, that the only people that we're to visit, the only people that we're to minister to, are widows and orphans. That's not what James is saying. James is using this to be illustrative of the fact that when we're saved, we are going to minister to those in need.

And, I tell you ladies and gentlemen, our city is hurting. And, all around us there are people who are in need. And, if you've been saved, if you've been born again, Jesus Christ wants to minister to those people through you. Not that you hire somebody to do it for you. This is not simply the work of the pastor, or the work of the educational director, the work of the quote, professional, end quote. This is the mark of anybody who's been born again.

Somebody needs your love, and Jesus Christ has no hands but your hands. He has no feet but your feet, no tongue but yours, no eyes but yours, no ears but yours. And, He wants to work and minister through you. And, if you have been saved, and if your religion is real, it's not merely going to show up on Sunday when you sit in a pew, but it's going to show up on Monday when you do something in a very practical way, in a very practical way.

Again, translating your faith into daily living. Oh, how we need to help one another. Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan. You can read it in Luke 10 when you get home. **But, He said there was man going from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among thieves. They left him wounded and dead, stripped, bleeding, dying. And a Levite, who was a very religious man, passed by on the other side, and a priest passed by. But, then a Samaritan, a despised person, part of a Mongrel race came. But, the Samaritan didn't pass him by. The Samaritan knelt down by him and gave him medication, and gave him encouragement, and finally the Samaritan put him on his beast, took him to an inn, took care of him.** There Jesus tells three philosophies of life that are in the city of Memphis, and that are all over the world.

First of all there are the beater uppers. They're recognized, they're represented by these thieves. And, then there are the passer uppers, they're represented by the priest and the Levites who went by on the other side. Now, I don't know where they were going. Maybe they were going to church Sunday morning at Bellevue, or maybe they were going to the Southern Baptist Convention, or maybe they were going to a revival crusade, I don't know, maybe they were going to a home Bible study. And, here was this poor man, down there in the ditch, and they were religious, but they passed him by. They left him there. There are the passer uppers and then there are the picker uppers. There's this Samaritan who came by and picked him up and ministered to him.

Now, the Bible teaches that if you're saved, you're not going to be a beater upper or a passer upper, you're going to be a picker upper. Real religion—*"Pure religion...undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction"* (James 1:27).

C. It Reaches Inward

Oh, dear friend, is it real to you? Has your religion transformed you in this area?

And, then I want you to notice the third, the third mark of supernatural religion. Not only does it reach upward, and not only does it reach outward, but it reaches inward. Look again in James chapter 1 and verse 27: *“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world”* (James 1:27). That is, it teaches inward. It’s going to give you a pure heart if you’ve really been saved, if you’ve really been born again, if there’s reality in your life.

Now, what does James mean when he says *the world*? He’s not talking here about the physical planet earth. He’s not talking about the world of nature. He’s not even talking about the world of men, for God loves the world of men. But, he’s talking about an ungodly value system that the Bible calls the world—*“...all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world”* (1 John 2:16), the Bible says. And, the Bible says, *“...If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him”* (1 John 2:15). Again the Bible says that *“...friendship with the world is warfare with God...”* (James 4:4). Now, many people have joined a church, but they still love this world. Christianity is just something they have tacked on. They are baptized pagans, living double lives, coming to church on Sunday and going through a form, but going out there on Monday and being just as much a part of this ungodly system, with no transformation whatever in their lives.

Now, James says that if your religion is real, not only is it going to reach upward and not only is it going to reach outward, it’s going to reach inward. You’re going to keep yourself unspotted from this world, and the only way to do that is to be born again, and to rely on the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s not by struggling, it’s not by trying, it’s by trusting.

We live in a power-conscience age, but if you were to take all of the megatons of hydrogen bombs and all of the rest of the bombs that the world has ever created—or that people have ever created—take all of those bombs—ever exploded, ever will be exploded—and take them, somehow, into the lapels of your coat and detonate those explosions, they would vaporize your body, but you’d never be able to blast the sin out of your spirit. It would still be there. You see, that kind of power can’t do it, and willpower can’t do it.

But, I want to tell you friend, there is dynamite in this book called the gospel. The Greek word for *power* is *dunamus*. It’s the word we get “dynamite” from. Oh, “I’m not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the dynamite of God” (Romans 1:16). And, I want to tell you, I’ve seen that dynamite go off. It went off in my own heart, and it blasted sin and hatred out of my own heart, and where that was there’s now a river bubbling up, a spring bubbling up.

Conclusion

I remember, as I too did not have the reality in my life I wanted. I'd been a church member. I wasn't certain I was saved. Because, when I came forward as a child they didn't deal with me properly. And, I remember stopping one night as a struggling teenager trying to live a pure life—stopped one night on the corner of 39th Street and Calvin Avenue in West Palm Beach, and looked straight up into the starry heavens and said, "O, God, I don't know whether I'm saved or lost, but I want to know, I need to know. And, Lord I have seen in Your Word where you've said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.' And, O God, with all of my heart, once and forever, every inch and every ounce as much as in me, O God, I trust You Jesus, and You alone to save me." And, when I said that, a river of peace began to flow in my heart, and it's still flowing to this very moment. When I trusted the Lord Jesus Christ and it became real to me, real to me. Is it real to you? Oh, my dear friend, it needs to be. Quit living a superficial life. Start living a supernatural life. Stop enduring religion, start enjoying salvation. Let yourself come into the fullness of God's blessings for you.

"If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:26–27).

I want to tell you what real religion will do for you, friend. In the first place it will do in times of sorrow. "Well," you say, "brother Rogers, I don't have any sorrow." Well, wait a while, then you will, you will. You mark it down, you're destined for sorrow. You'll not escape. The Spanish have a proverb: "There is no home without its hush." And, I want to tell you, if you've got the real thing, it'll do when you face sorrow.

I've been in the hospital this week visiting people who have terrible problems, horrible problems, but I've seen the light of the glory of Jesus Christ on their faces, because they have the real thing. Not only will it do in time of sorrow, it'll do in time of death. Some of you have a religion that seems all right to live by, but mister, it's no good to die by. And, the real test of your religion is when your feet touch those chilly waters of the river of death. Is Jesus Christ real? Can you feel in your hand the nail-scarred hand? The one who said, *"I'll never leave you, nor forsake you."* (Hebrews 13:5). Not only will it see you through sorrow, and see you through death, but it'll see you through the judgment.

Oh, there is therefore now, no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Now, I want you to check up. Is it superficial or is it supernatural? Have you been born again? Let's pray.

The Sad Case of the Snooty Usher

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: July 16, 1978

Main Scripture Text: James 2:1–10

“If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:”

JAMES 2:8

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Prohibition of Prejudice
- II. The Problem of Partiality
 - A. The Appearance of the Men
 - B. The Attitude of the Usher
 - C. The Appraisal of the Lord
- III. The Position of the Poor
 - A. They're Chosen of God
 - B. They're Rich in Faith
 - C. They're an Heir of the Kingdom of God
- IV. The Persecution by the Prosperous
 - A. The Gospel hit at Their Position
 - B. The Gospel hit at their Pocketbook
- V. The Precepts for Proper Practice

Conclusion

Introduction

Take your Bibles, please, and turn if you will to James chapter 2. We worked our way through James chapter 1. As we continue our journey with James, as he's telling us about religion in shoe leather, practical Christianity. We're going to read together now, the first 10 verses of James chapter 2, "The Sad Case of the Snooty Usher."

“My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then

partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:1–10).

Prejudice is what makes people down on what they’re not up on, and James warns very strongly about this. So, I want you to think tonight with me on the strange case of the snooty usher.

I. The Prohibition of Prejudice

Now, James makes at least five powerful points in the scripture that I’ve read to you. The first is the prohibition of prejudice in verse 1: *“My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons”* (James 2:1). Now, this word “respect of persons” is actually a combination of a noun and a verb in the Greek, and what it means, if we were to translate it literally is, “don’t lay hold of a person’s face.” Now, what does that mean? It means that don’t judge a person by their appearance. *“...for man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart”* (1 Samuel 16:7). There is nothing that can hurt the Kingdom of Christ and the work of our Lord more than snobbishness in a church. Where we look on a certain person who, because of his economic status, or the way he is dressed, or the way he looks, we look upon him and judge him to be thus and so of a person, and treat him accordingly.

Now, it may be that we treat him with flattery because he tends to be very affluent looking, and very intelligent, or very witty, or very charming or whatever it is. And, we may flatter the person. Or, it may be that we treat him with snobbishness, and that we repudiate him, and that we reject him, also because of his appearance, because there’s something about the way he appears that we do not like. And, we don’t do it because of any rational reason, we just simply lay hold of a person’s face. We jump at conclusions. You know, it’s dangerous to jump at conclusions, did you know that? Somebody said, “Once there was a dog named August who was always jumping at conclusions. One day he jumped at the conclusion of a mule, that was the last day of August.”

Now, people are known to just simply look at something and say, “I like it,” or “I don’t like it.” This man is good, that man is bad, and it’s all just simply due to appearances. And, when we do that we have what the Bible calls “respect of persons.” And, when we

have respect of persons, we may be flattering some people and gossiping about, or criticizing, other people, not because of anything inherently good, or anything inherently bad in that person, but because of simply how they appear.

Now, you know the difference between gossip and flattery? Flattery is where we say to someone's face what we don't say behind their back, and gossip is where we say behind someone's back what we don't say to their face. And, both are wrong. And, whether you're in the business of flattering and fawning over the rich and the cultured, or whether you're in the business of criticizing and gossiping about the poor and the down and out, you are wrong in the sight of God—and what damage it does to the Kingdom of God.

II. The Problem of Partiality

Now, I want you to notice not only the prohibition of prejudice in chapter 2 verse 1. But, I want you to notice further the problem of partiality in verses 2 through 4. *“For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing...”*—and that doesn't mean he's dressed like a homosexual. Isn't it horrible that a word like *gay* could be taken and perverted like the perverts that use it? But, what he means here is goodly—goodly clothing—fine clothing. There comes into your assembly one that weareth fine clothing. And you say to him—*“Sit thou here in a good place”*—that is, you usher him right down to a chief seat—*“and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool”* (James 2:2–3).

Now, here's a man who has such a good seat that he also has a footstool. And, yet he says to this poor person, “You just sit down here at my feet.” Now, here the Lord warns against the problem of partiality. We go on in verse 4: *“Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?”* (James 2:4).

A. The Appearance of the Men

Now, as we're talking here about the problem of partiality, I want you to notice three things. First of all, the appearance of the men who come to church. First of all, there comes in Mr. Goldfingers. Now, he actually—that's what this word “with a gold ring,” literally means in the Greek a “golden fingered man,” Mr. Goldfinger. He has a gem at every joint. He has a nugget at every knuckle. He's just very wealthy, and you can just see that he's wearing a Hart Schaffner and Marx, and that he is just a person who has arrived. You say, “Wow, who is he? Look at that man. I can tell he's somebody important. Move way and make way for the gentlemen, and give him a good seat.” And, so he comes in, and he has a seat, and the usher shows a lot of respect to him.

You know, there are a lot of people that think it's so important how you dress and

what you look like outwardly, and that's all some people are really cognizant about in church. A woman asked her husband when they got home, "Say, did you notice the hat Mrs. Jones had on this morning?" He said, "No, I didn't notice that." She said, "Well, did you notice Mrs. Smith's new dress?" He said, "No, I didn't notice that." "Well," she said, "What good does it do you to go to church? You never get anything out of it." Well, that's just about the wavelength that some people seem to be on. And, they're just so aware of how a person is dressed, or how they appear when they come to church.

And, then in contour distinction to this there comes into the same church service another man. And, when the usher sees him, the usher says, "Well, obviously, this man is not worth very much," because he has on what the Bible calls here a vile raiment. Now, this word "vile raiment," means "dirty clothes." He has on dirty clothes. Obviously, he's a laboring man, a working man, and he hasn't had a chance really to bathe and freshen up. Maybe he's just come to the assembly, he's come to church, and maybe he's got dirt under his fingernails. Maybe his shoes are not shined. But, he's someone for whom Jesus died—someone for whom Jesus died. Never judge a jewel because it comes in a plain box. He's a soul whom Jesus loves.

But, this usher looks at him and says, "Well, that guy's not worth much, it makes no difference whether he gets a seat, whether she gets a seat. Stand over here, sit down there." And, that person has a spirit that's crushed, and a spirit that's wounded. Oh, the damage that's done to the cause of Christ.

Did you know Mahatma Gandhi, the great leader of India, was searching for a philosophy, searching for a way, searching for some way to reach the people of India for whom he had a burden? And, he studied the different faiths, and the different ideologies and religions of the world, and he studied Christianity. And, he said, "I believe that's it. I believe that Christianity is what the people of India need," so he went to a church to learn more. And, an usher met him at the church, and when the usher saw him and saw who he was, the usher said, "I'm sorry, sir, this church is for Europeans only." And, Mahatma Gandhi went away and became the Hindu leader of India, a man that could have reached multiplied millions of souls for Jesus Christ. But, someone looked at him, and someone laid hold of his face rather than looking at his heart. Such a crime, such a shame.

B. **The Attitude of the Usher**

There was, first of all, the appearance of the men and then there was the attitude of the usher in verse 3: "*And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool*" (James 2:3). The usher made the mistake, that so many make in so many churches across America, and it is indulgence of the rich and indifference to

the poor.

C. **The Appraisal of the Lord**

Well, after you see the appearance of the men, and the attitude of the usher, I want you to notice the appraisal of the Lord. I want you to see what the Lord said, “*Are ye not then partial in yourselves*”—verse 4—“*and are become judges of evil thoughts?*” (James 2:4). Now, look at that phrase “partial in yourselves.” It literally means, “have you not made distinctions among yourselves,” that’s what it means. You have made distinctions, you have set one person in one category and another person in another category. You cannot do that, my friend. The ground around the cross is level. All people are precious in the sight of God, and if you haven’t learned that, you have not learned anything, not even the rudiments about Christianity.

Now, notice the Bible does not say there is not seniority. Oh, there’s to be seniority. There is seniority in a church. The Bible speaks of those who have labored long in doctrine. The Bible speaks of those who have proven their lives by living the right kind of life. And, the Bible says to give “*...honour to whom honour*” (Romans 13:7) is due. It is not to say there’s not to be authority in the church. There is to be authority in the church. God has set some in authority, and don’t you think that in any assembly that there is no spiritual authority? There is seniority, and there is authority, but there is no superiority.

Now, get that down. No superiority. We may be different as to calling, and different as to appointment, and different as to job, but in the sight of God—in a New Testament church—everybody is somebody when Jesus Christ is Lord. Everybody is somebody when Jesus Christ is Lord. And, so the Lord remonstrates with the Church. It says, “When you make differences among yourselves, you sin against the Lord.” If you want to write a scripture text down along side this passage, just write 2 Samuel chapter 16, verse 7: “*...the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart*” (1 Samuel 16:7).

III. **The Position of the Poor**

Now, the third thing I want you to notice tonight, not only the prohibition of prejudice and not only the problem of partiality, but I want you to notice the position of the poor. What the Lord says about the poor here in verse 5: “*Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?*” (James 2:5).

A. **They’re Chosen of God**

You see, there are three things the Lord says about the poor as He speaks about the position of the poor. First of all, He says they’re chosen of God. Abraham Lincoln

said, “God must have loved common people, He made so many of them.” You see, God loves the poor. God loves the common. He does indeed, they are chosen of the Lord. As a matter of fact, it is God’s divine plan that He carries on most of His work with poor people, ordinary people.

Just keep your finger there in James chapter 2, and turn with me to 1 Corinthians for just a moment, and look in chapter 1 beginning in verse 26. Now, I want you to see the people that God had chosen to do His mighty work with, primarily. First Corinthians 1:26: *“For ye see your calling, brethren”—same thing James is talking about, being called or being chosen. “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things... That no flesh should glory in his presence”* (1 Corinthians 1:26–29).

Now, God says, “I have ordained and chosen to use ordinary people, so that when it is done, human flesh won’t get the glory, God will get the glory.” And, so God takes the weak and makes them witnesses. God takes the base and turns them into believers. God takes the despised and makes disciples out of them. And, God takes the nobody’s and makes them nobilities. That’s God’s plan.

B. They’re Rich in Faith

And, so the first thing I want you to see about the position of the poor is they’re chosen of God, they’re chosen of God. And, the second thing, they’re rich in faith. Go back to James chapter 2 again. You see, a rich man has a tendency to trust his money. The poor man has to trust the Lord, and so there’s just sort of a built-in propensity toward faith among those that are poor. Sometimes being poor is not a curse. It may indeed be a blessing. Sometimes riches may be a curse.

And, so look again, as the Lord speaks in verse 5: *“...Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith...”* (James 2:5). And, so when you see a poor man, if you snub him, you really may be snubbing a spiritual millionaire—a bureaucrat, an aristocrat—so be very careful. Sometimes we, *“entertain angels unawares”* (Hebrews 13:2). Rich in faith.

C. They’re an Heir of the Kingdom of God

The third thing James says about the position of the poor, not only is he chosen of God, not only is he rich in faith, *“he is an heir of the Kingdom which God hath promised to them that love him”* (James 2:5). Oh, how rich they will be not only here but by and by, *“the meek shall inherit the earth...”* (Psalm 37:11). I’m telling you, friend, you be careful. This person may be very, very important in the world to come.

Adoniram Judson was a great missionary. He went to Burma. He labored long. He prayed. He fasted. He witnessed. But, rather than souls coming to Jesus, Adoniram Judson was arrested. He was tortured. He was strung up by his thumbs, and ridiculed. Finally, he was cut down and cast into a vile, filthy, dirty, vermin-infested prison, just a hole, just a cage. And, his tormenters came to Adoniram Judson and said, “What about your plans to win the heathen to Christ? Now, what do you have to say about your future?” Do you know what Adoniram Judson said? “My future is as bright as the promises of God.” Amen. I want to tell you, every poor person in this world can say that. If he knows the Lord Jesus Christ, if he’s saved, he is an heir of the Kingdom of God, and he can say, “My future is as bright as the promises of God.”

IV. The Persecution by the Prosperous

And, so James is very plain. He speaks of the prohibition of prejudice. He speaks of the perils and the problems of partiality. He speaks of the position of the poor, and then he speaks of the persecution by the prosperous. I want you to notice verses 6 and 7 now, “...ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do they not blaspheme that holy name by which ye are called?” (James 2:6–7). And, now he speaks of the persecution that prosperous people sometimes do to poor people. What James is talking about here is the wealthy ruling class that persecuted the early Church, and they did.

You see, Christianity took off, by and large, by the people of the streets—the common people. They were called unlettered and ignorant people. But, Jesus was the kind of a teacher, and the kind of a preacher, where the common people heard Him gladly.

A. The Gospel hit at Their Position

But, the rich and the wealthy and the aristocrat, they repudiated Christ for three reasons. You see, first of all, the gospel hit at their position. You see, the gospel says that everybody is equal. You know, there’s some of you that don’t even like that. I mean, when I’m saying it right now, you go, “Uhuh, uhuh,” you see, the gospel hits at that. They don’t like that. Everybody likes to feel a little superior to somebody else. See. And, that’s the reason the rich repudiated the gospel, because it hit at their position.

You see, Pilate, for example, had position with Caesar, and what determined Pilate’s conduct was what buttered his bread and gave him position. When they said to Pilate, “If you don’t allow us to crucify Jesus, you’re not Caesar’s friend,” that settled it. Pilate had a position, and the gospel hit at his position, and so he took a side—he took sides against Christ and His followers.

B. The Gospel hit at their Pocketbook

But, not only did the gospel hit at their position, the gospel also hit at their pocketbook. There were many rich who repudiated the gospel because of economics.

Remember there in Ephesus, where Paul went to Ephesus, and he begin to preach Christ and preach against Diana? Now, we'll look just for a moment in Acts chapter 19. You remember Diana was the great goddess of the city of Ephesus? Look in Acts chapter 19 and verse 27. You'll see how the rich felt about the gospel, those who were in position. And, so their man stands up and says, "Something needs to be done with this man Paul because, and I'm reading verse 27: *"So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth"* (Acts 19:27).

Now, they said, "We've got to do something with this preacher, Paul, because our business is in danger." The same thing is true in Acts chapter 16, where there was a demon-possessed girl who Paul healed and cured, and the wealthy people who were in charge of that demon- possessed girl had Paul and Silas cast into prison.

You see, many times the wealthy and the rich despise the gospel—the true gospel—because it hits at their position. It hits at their pocketbook, and it also hits at their pride— at their pride. The reason that so many people want money is to help them to be elevated above other people, but along comes the gospel and says that, "we're to boast in nothing but Jesus Christ our Lord." For when God looks at you, it is not the blue book of society, not the bankbook of finance, but it's God's book that makes the difference as to what you are.

You see, we tend to want to put men, some men, on this level. We say upper class, and then middle class, and then lower class, but God never divides men horizontally, God always divides them vertically: the sheep and the goats, the saved and the lost, the saints and the ain'ts. And, that's the way God divides them, you see, and here's a person who's worked all of his life to have all of these things that's going to put him up here, and then all of the sudden the gospel says you're just like everybody else when it comes to be needing to be saved.

And, so the rich began to reject this gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And, they begin to persecute the poor. And, James said when they persecuted the poor, what they were doing was blaspheming God. Why was that?

Where—remember when Paul was on the road to Damascus, and the Lord Jesus appeared to him? And, the Lord Jesus said to Paul, who was then called Saul, *"Saul, why persecutest thou me?"* (Acts 22:7). I can hear Saul as he argues with the Lord, "Well, Jesus, whoever you are, I'm not persecuting you, I'm persecuting the Christians." Oh, but don't you see, friend, when Paul was persecuting the Christians, he was

persecuting Jesus Christ. When you speak against a poor servant of Jesus, you're really speaking against Jesus. It is blasphemy. *"Inasmuch as you've done it unto the least of one of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me"* (Matthew 25:40). Why persecutest thou me?

Now, somebody says, "Wait a minute, Brother Rogers, you're being very hard on the rich." Well, I don't mean to be. Some of the sweetest persons, and sweetest Christians, I've ever known are rich people. As a matter of fact, I've found that generally, in a church, that people who are better off will rise to a place of leadership in a church. Do you know why? The same principles that made them a success in business make them the kind of a person you can count on to do church work. They'll be punctual. They'll think things out. They'll follow through, and all of the rest of it.

Now, James would not say to put down a poor man, and James certainly wouldn't say to put a rich man down, but what James is saying is that don't you elevate one person above another. Don't put down the poor. Don't put down the rich. You can be just as guilty about being prejudiced against a rich person as you could a poor person. All of us want to look down on somebody, and sometimes people who are poor look down upon the rich. But, you know that scripture that says, *"ye see your calling, brethren... not many mighty, not many noble, are called"* (1 Corinthians 1:26). It doesn't say, "Not any mighty. Not any noble."

Lady Huntington, who was a great friend to the Wesley's, a woman of wealth, and a woman of culture, and a woman of position; Lady Huntington said, "I was saved by an M." And, they said, "What do you mean by that?" She said, "If that verse had said not any mighty, not any noble are called, I'd be in sad shape., But, it didn't say not any, it says not many, not many." She was saved by an "M." And, I thank God for the many that I know who are wealthy, who are noble, who are fine people who love the Lord Jesus Christ, and their wealth is committed to the cause of Christ.

But, do you know what I long to pastor? I long to pastor a church where everybody is somebody. Where a doctor, and a lawyer, and a banker, and financier is welcome. And, then where the man in rags, and the illiterate is welcome, where the ignorant and the educated are welcome. Where when people come in they just look around and say, "There's something different about those people." Behold, how they love one another. Isn't that the kind of a church you want to belong to? Where everybody is somebody and Jesus Christ is Lord. I want to tell you, there's something about that that will make a holy contagion that God Almighty will be pleased to bless.

V. The Precepts for Proper Practice

There's the persecution by the prosperous and then finally the precepts for proper practice that give us eight and nine. Look at it. *"If ye fulfil the royal law according to the*

scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:8–10).

Why does the Bible call this the royal law? Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Because it's the king of all laws. It's the king of all laws. It's the royal law. You see, friend, when you have love in your heart, you're not going to be partial among yourselves. And, there's something so contagious about that love.

Conclusion

A little fellow left his home and walked for miles to get to a certain church. He walked past many churches. Someone asked him, “Why do you go so far to go to church, to that one particular church?” He said, “Because they love a fellow over there.” Another little boy was talking about a friend that he met. He was telling his mama, “I just think he's such a neat guy.” And, his mama said, “What is it that you like so much about him?” And, the little fellow said, “He treats me like I'm a people.”

Oh, listen, we need to learn that everybody is somebody because Jesus is Lord. Let's bow in prayer.

The Mercies of God

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: July 23, 1978

Main Scripture Text: James 2:8–13

“For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.”

JAMES 2:13

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Sovereignty of the Scripture
 - II. The Sinfulness of the Sinner
 - A. Transgression of the Law Is Sin
 - B. Omission Is Sin
 - C. Whatsoever Is Not of Faith Is Sin
 - D. Human Goodness Is Sin
 - E. Unbelief Is Sin
 - III. The Severity of the Sentence
 - IV. The Sweetness of the Salvation
- Conclusion

Introduction

We’re thinking today on this subject: “The Mercies of God.” Now, I want us to read here in James chapter 2, beginning in verse 8, and that’s where we left off in our last message—James chapter 2, verse 8—as we speak on God’s marvelous mercy: *“If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that...shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.”* (James 2:8–13)

One of the problems in getting men saved is getting men lost. Many people are not saved because they never see themselves lost, and they never see themselves lost because they never recognize their sinfulness. We said in the early service that *most people in America are egomaniacs who are strutting their way to hell, thinking that*

they are too good to be damned.

There's a story—a parable—about a king who visited a slave ship where the slaves were chained to the oars in the galley. And, the king walked up and down among these men who were being lashed on their backs and whose perspiration was dropping from their brow as they labored hard at the oars, and the king interviewed them. He asked one man, "Why are you here?" "Well," he said, "Sire, I ought not to be here." He said, "I'm an innocent man. I'm an upstanding citizen. I was standing on a street corner when a crime was committed, and I was arrested. And alas—alas—look at me now." He talked to another and said, "Why are you here?" "Oh," he said, "I'm here because someone told a terrible lie about me. Someone accused me of a crime of which I am innocent." Another gave another excuse, and everyone seemed to have some alibi—some excuse, some silly reason—why he was there, until at last the king came to one man and said, "And, why are you here?" "Oh," he said, "Sire, I'm here because I have sinned against God. I've committed crimes against my king and against the State. I'm here because I deserve to be here. This is the punishment for my crime. Thus and thus have I done," and he made a full confession to his king. When the king heard that confession, the king said to him, "You rogue! You rascal! You vile sinner! You lowly criminal! What are you doing here among so many honest men? Guard, release him and let him go." The reason that so many of us have not received the King's mercy is that we have never confessed before the King our crimes and our sins against God. Life is short. Death is sure. Sin is the curse. Christ is the cure, but we'll never know the cure until we recognize the curse and plead to God for mercy.

Now, James takes the pen of the Spirit, and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, James paints an awful picture of the human race. And, James shows us that our only hope is the mercy of God, and I pray that God will give me the unction and the ability to show you that today—that the only hope of heaven that you have is to cry out to God for mercy and for you to say to God, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." There are four things I want you to notice in the scripture this morning.

I. The Sovereignty of the Scripture

The first thing I want you to notice is the sovereignty of the Scripture—the sovereignty of the Scripture. Look again, if you will please, in verse 8: "*If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture*" (James 2:8)—the royal law. Why is the Bible a sovereign law? Why is the Bible a royal law? Because it is given by a King. As I stand before you preaching this morning, I'm not merely preaching my word; I am preaching the Word of God. This is a royal decree. These words have come from the Lord. Their source is in God.

If you will read in the Old Testament, over four thousand times, you will hear

statements like this: “The word of the Lord came unto me saying,” “God spoke,” “God commanded,” “Thus saith the Lord,” “Hear ye the word of the Lord,” “God commanded this,” and “God spoke thusly.” And, over and over and over again, the Bible purports to be and claims to be and asserts that it is the very Word of God. Now, ladies and gentlemen, if it is not the very Word of God, it is not even a good book; it is a blasphemous book that contains over four thousand lies as to its origin. Oh, but it’s not a blasphemous book; it is the Word of God—inerrant, infallible—and it is the royal law of God. And, you deny it, you turn your back on it, you spurn it, you ignore it, and you will have to deal not with the preacher, but with the author of this book. I’m only the Western Union boy delivering a message from the King. It is the royal law. So, the first thing I want you to notice (and quite briefly) is the sovereignty—the sovereignty—of the Scriptures, the royal law.

II. The Sinfulness of the Sinner

Now, when you see that, then it will help you to see the sinfulness of the sinner, because I want us to continue to read, now, verse 9 and following: *“But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou [are] become a transgressor of the law.”* (James 2:9–11) Notice what James said: James says that the law is so sovereign and the law comes from such a great God that that God holds you guilty for all of the law if you break just one point of the law—just one point. You don’t have to break all of the Ten Commandments to be a sinner. You don’t have to even commit some vile sin to be a sinner. James said, “Even if you have a sin like respect of persons, if you’re guilty of looking down on somebody and counting somebody as unworthy just simply because of their outward appearance,” James said, “you have become a transgressor of the law.” (James 2:9) And, if you break the law in one point, James says you’re guilty of all. (James 2:10)

Now, people want to argue about that, and they say, “Now, wait a minute—wait a minute. I may have done this, but I haven’t done that.” Suppose a judge has a criminal in front of him, and the criminal is arrested for breaking and entering—or the criminal is arrested for assault and battery, or for murder, or rape, or whatever it is. And, the judge says, “Are you guilty of rape?” “Well, yes, sir, I am, but let me tell you all the other things: I did stop at a stop sign today, and I…” Well, what difference does that make, friend? We’re not talking about what he hasn’t done; we’re talking about what he has done. You see, just one transgression makes you a sinner in the sight of a righteous and a holy God, and that God demands perfection—perfection. And, you can’t supply it,

and I can't supply it. Here are God's Ten Commandments. How many of them do you have to break to become a sinner in the sight of a righteous and holy God? Ten? No, just one. *Here is a man hanging over a fire by a chain of ten links. How many links in that chain have to break before he falls in the fire? All ten? No, just one. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, [that person] is guilty of all."* (James 2:10)

Now, let's see if you're keeping the law. Do you know what's wrong with many of us? We don't have a real conception of what sin is. Somehow we think that we're pretty good folks and that the pastor is talking to all of those old sinners, whoever they may be and where ever they may be. But folks, like Pogo said, "We met the enemy, and they is us." I mean, I'm talking to us right here. It's not those folks out yonder; it's us. And, "it's me, it's me, it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer."

Let me give you some Bible definitions of sin. Now, you just keep in mind, now, that the Bible says, "*Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, [the same] is guilty of all.*" (James 2:10) Keep that in mind, and let me give you some Bible definitions of sin.

A. Transgression of the Law Is Sin

For example, 1 John 3, verse 4 says that "*sin is the transgression of the law.*" (1 John 3:4) God has given His righteous, holy law. God has given His Ten Commandments, and you break those laws—you transgress those laws—then you become a sinner. Actually, really, *you don't break God's laws; you're broken on them. Here's a man who jumps out of a ten-story building. He says, "I'm going to break the law of gravity." What he breaks is his neck. He demonstrates the law of gravity. And, God's laws are what you break yourself on when you transgress those laws. "Sin is the transgression of the law."* (1 John 3:4) God says, "Thou shalt not," and you do it. God says, "Thou shalt," and if you fail to do it, then... "*Sin is the transgression of the law.*" (1 John 3:4)

B. Omission Is Sin

But, it is more than that. Many of us realize that "*sin is the transgression of the law,*" (1 John 3:4) but many of us have not realized some other things about sin. James says in James chapter 4 and verse 17—listen to this verse: "*Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*" (James 4:17) Did you hear that? "*To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*" (James 4:17) Not only do you sin by doing the things that you ought not to have done, but you also sin by failing to do the things that you ought to have done. And, Jesus said that the sins of omission are greater than the sins of commission—by leaving undone those things that you ought to have done. (Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42)

Now, how many of us—how many of us—can say this morning, "I've done

everything that I ought to do all through my life. I've shown love every time I ought to show love. I've prayed every time I ought to have prayed. I have studied the Bible like I ought to study the Bible. I have witnessed like I ought to have witnessed. I have given my money like I ought to have given my money. I have applied my mind in meditation to the Lord like I should have"? Have you done that? Is there anybody who can say, "I've always done that"? Of course not. *"To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* (James 4:17) And, when we understand this definition of sin, then we just kind of have to hang our heads and say, "Guilty." Amen? Guilty—every one of us! We know that we have not done everything we ought to have done.

I heard—I heard—of a soldier who was shot—court-martialed and shot—for picking violets. And, you say, "Well, that must have been a cruel commander of that army." Well, the problem was that while the soldier was picking violets for his girlfriend, he was supposed to have been on guard duty and the enemies slipped in. You see, it's not so much what we are doing that's wrong; it's what we are failing to do that we ought to be doing. And, many of you are doing things that seem harmless in themselves, but you're not serving God as you ought. *"[And] to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* (James 4:17) An employer said to an employee, "You're fired." He said, "What for? I ain't done nothin'." He said, "That's why you're fired." And, I'm sure that God would look at us the same way. We are like salt that's lost its savor—good for nothing. (Matthew 5:13)

C. Whatsoever Is Not of Faith Is Sin

But, wait a minute—the Bible is not finished with the definition of sin. Not only is sin the transgression of the law, and not only is sin failing to do what we ought to do, but the Bible also says that *"whatsoever is not of faith is sin."* (Romans 14:23) Romans chapter 14 and verse 23: *"For whatsoever is not of faith is sin."* (Romans 14:23) Now, what does that mean? That doesn't mean, if you don't have all of the faith that you ought to have, that you're sinning. We'll talk about that in a moment. That means that if you take any course of action—that if you do anything—that you don't have full confidence that it's the will of God, you sin. If you have any habit—any practice—in your life that you think may be wrong, then you sin.

Do you know there are a lot of people who smoke cigarettes, and they say, "Show me a verse in the Bible that says, "Thou shalt not smoke cigarettes." I say, "Show me a verse in the Bible that says, "Thou shalt not drive through a school zone at a hundred and ten miles an hour." The book—the Bible—is not a book of minute laws; it's a book of great principles, and one of those principles is that *"your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost...[that you] have of God."* (1 Corinthians 6:19) "But, wait a minute," somebody says. "Well, I'm not quite sure. I've got a doubt whether it's right or wrong."

Well, then, if you've got a doubt, then leave it alone. See: "*whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*" (Romans 14:23) That's what he's saying.

One man was back in the bedroom, and they were getting ready to go to a party. His wife was in the living room; the guests had already arrived, and she was talking to one of the lady guests. And, he yelled from the bedroom and said, "Sweetheart, is this shirt clean enough to wear?" She said, "No," and never even went back there. Later on, he came out buttoning up another shirt and said, "How did you know that that shirt was not clean enough to wear?" She said, "If you had to ask, it wasn't." If it's doubtful, it's dirty. That's what James is saying: "*Whatsoever is not*"—that's what Paul is saying—"*whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*" (Romans 14:23) Well, we go down on that one, too, don't we? I think every one of us, as we would examine our lives and as we look at God's definition of sin—transgression of the law, failing to do what we ought to do, whatsoever is not of faith—we'd have to say, "Guilty, guilty, guilty."

D. Human Goodness Is Sin

But now, hold on—wait a minute—I want to give you another definition of sin. And, I know that some of you are not going to agree with this one, but I'm going to give it from the Bible and then let you argue with the Bible: human goodness is sin—human goodness is sin. Listen to these verses.

Isaiah 64 and verse 6: "*all our [righteousness is] as filthy rags [in His sight]*" (Isaiah 64:6)—all our righteousness! Now, do you know what the word "filthy rags" means here? Most commentators believe it refers to the filthy bandage that was cast away from a leper's sore. When the leper had his vile running sores and would be wrapped with a bandage, when they would take that bandage off, it was called a "filthy rag." And, God says, "That's what I think of your goodness, not what I think of your badness. That's what I think of your righteousness—your self-righteousness."

You see, the Bible says—and let me give you another verse, if you're jotting these verses down in your margin: Proverbs 21, verse 4. Here's one that will jolt you—it says, "*The plowing of the wicked, is sin.*" (Proverbs 21:4) Now, we're still under the subject that human goodness is sin. "*The plowing of the wicked, is sin.*" (Proverbs 21:4) When a farmer over here in West Memphis gets on his tractor and plows his cotton, his soybeans, and that farmer is not a Christian, he sins. Down here in Mississippi, or in Tennessee—now, we'll take Kentucky; some of them here—and you up in Missouri, let me tell you—let me tell you—something, friend: "*The plowing of the wicked, is sin.*" (Proverbs 21:4) How could it be? Because an unsaved man contaminates everything he touches. For a man without the Lord Jesus Christ, without serving God, to put a seed in the ground that only God can make grow and not thank God for it, that man commits a terrible, horrible sin—a man who even plows a field without dependence upon Almighty

God. You see, the unsaved man contaminates everything he touches. If he works in the church, he contaminates that. If he works in the PTA, he contaminates that. If he works for the Chamber of Commerce, he contaminates that.

We've used this illustration before, but I want to use it again because it's such a good one. Here's a man, a woman, or a man mixing a fruit salad—you like a fruit salad?—fresh peaches, and pears, and grapes, and bananas, and other things. And, here's a person just taking cream and the finest ingredients and mixing a lovely fruit salad. Oh, we all love a fruit salad. There's just one thing wrong: this man or this woman has vile running open sores on their hands—a contagious disease—and they're making a salad for your lunch today. Do you want any? Why not? There's nothing wrong with the bananas, nothing wrong with the grapes, nothing wrong with the apples, but you see, the person who mixes it contaminates it. And, an unsaved person, because he himself is a sinner, contaminates everything he touches.

There's nothing wrong with plowing, but still, *"the plowing of the wicked, is sin."* (Proverbs 21:4) God says that *"[your righteousness is] as filthy rags [in my sight]."* (Isaiah 64:6) Listen, the worst form of badness is human goodness when that human goodness becomes a substitute for the new birth. And, how many people are substituting their righteousness for God's righteousness, and, therefore, they're lost?

E. Unbelief Is Sin

Now, when you consider God's definitions of sin—He's not finished yet—the Bible also says that unbelief is sin. Jesus said that "the Holy Spirit is come into the world to convict the world of sin because they believe not." (John 16:8–9)—not because they lie, steal, cheat, swear, but because they believe not. The mother sin, the father sin—the sin out of which all of the sins grow—is the sin of unbelief. That's the reason the Bible says in John chapter 3, verse 18: *"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed [on] the name of the only begotten Son of God."* (John 3:18) You see, unbelief is a sin of high treason against God.

Now folks, take these definitions of sin and apply them to James's allegation of sin—that *"whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."* (James 2:10) That's enough to make everybody here see that, in the sight of God, he stands condemned. Isn't it? I say, isn't it? Surely it is! Oh, the sovereignty of the Scripture and the sinfulness of the sinner—those are two things that James has shown us.

III. The Severity of the Sentence

Now, the third thing I want you to see that James talks about is the severity of the

sentence—the severity of the sentence. Continue to read here in the book of James, as James goes on to speak in verses 12 and 13: *“So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that...shewed no mercy”*—*“he shall have judgment without mercy...[who] shewed no mercy.”* (James 2:12–13) There is a judgment day coming, and for the man who knows not God it’s going to be a very severe judgment.

Now, we have those today who talk about the goodness of God, and some people are going to hell because all they’ve heard is the verse of Scripture that says, *“God is love.”* (1 John 4:8) Now, God is love, but God is also holy. And, a holy God must punish sin, and that’s what James is saying. James says, *“If you live without mercy, you’re going to be judged without mercy.”* (James 2:13) Some people just see one side of the nature of God, but jot down in your margin there *“Romans 11 and verse 22.”* And, Romans 11 and verse 22 says, *“Behold therefore the goodness and the severity of God”*—*“[the] severity of God.”* (Romans 11:22) We’re talking now about the severity of the sentence. I can’t think of anything more terrifying—anything more frightening—than this phrase *“judgment without mercy.”*

Ladies and gentlemen, the only hope of heaven that I have—the only hope of heaven that you have—is the marvelous mercy of God. And oh, how closely akin are grace and mercy! Grace is God giving us what we don’t deserve, and mercy is God not giving us what we do deserve. And oh, we need the mercies of God—the marvelous, matchless, infinite mercies of God. But, some people are going to be judged, and there will be no mercy. It will do them no good to stand before the Great White Throne and, with tears streaming down their cheeks, say, *“O God! O God! Have mercy!”* There will be none. That’s the Word of God—judgment without mercy for some people. Which people? Those people who showed no mercy.

Look in verse 13: *“For he shall have judgment without mercy, that...shewed no mercy.”* (James 2:13) Now, we must be very careful here. I don’t want anyone to think for one scintilla of a second that he can purchase the mercy of God by he himself being merciful. It is not that God is saying, *“Now, if you will be merciful to others, I will be merciful to you.”* It is not God saying that, *“because you have been so good and so nice, that I am going to be good to you.”* That is not what James means; that is not what God says. I believe that what James is saying and showing is simply this: that a person who shows no mercy shows that he knows not God, because *“God is love.”* (1 John 4:8) And, how can we say that we love God, whom we’ve not seen, and love not our neighbor, whom we have seen.

You see, when a man has no mercy—when a man has a heartless, blind eye to the needs of others, when a man turns a deaf ear to the cries of the poor, when a man lives a self-centered life—that is a sign that he is a man without love, and, therefore, he is a

man without grace. And, therefore, if he's a man without grace, he's a man without God. And, therefore, if he's a man without God, he is a man without salvation, and if he's a man without salvation, he's a man without mercy. That's what James is saying. James is very practical. And James, as we're going to see tonight when we talk about the difference between faith and works, James is not saying that you're saved by works, but James will say that you are saved by a faith that works. You are saved by a faith that transforms your life. And, if the mercy and the love of God has not come into your life, if you're one in whom the milk of human kindness has curdled, if you're a person that is filled with hate and venom and vengeance, then, dear friend, you, at the Judgment Bar of Almighty God, are going to receive no mercy—no mercy—judgment without mercy.

There is coming a time when the dead are going to stand before God. Their graves are going to vomit up their moaning, shrieking, groaning dead, and one by one they're going to stand before the Great White Throne to be judged. I'm talking about the unsaved dead now. The saved dead will never come to that Great White Throne. I'm talking about the unsaved dead. It's the time the Negro spiritual sings about: "I went to the rock to hide my face, And the rock cried out no hidin' place, no hidin' place down here." One by one the dead are judged. And then, you are going to come face to face with Deity. You are going to meet the Lord Jesus Christ. You have an appointment with Jesus Christ. *"[For] it is appointed unto [man] once to die, [and] after this the judgment."* (Hebrews 9:27)

Just suppose the end of time has come. Suppose the Millennium has ended. Suppose the trumpet has sounded and the unsaved dead now stand to face the Judgment. Suppose it's you, and your trial begins. Every trial has three parts. First of all, the evidence is presented against you. And, we've just gone over the evidence: transgression of the law, failing to do good, whatsoever is not of faith, unbelief, human goodness without the new birth. All of these things will be marshaled and arrayed against you—lies you told, things that you've forgotten about, things that happened in Vietnam, things that happened in Korea, things that happened on that Lover's Lane, things that you wrote on that income tax report, things that you—answers that you—stole in school, times that you've gossiped, times that you were filled with lustful thoughts, times that you were filled with hate, every idle word—there it is, all recorded with a pen of iron and rocks of lead and letters of flame. The books were opened and the evidence is presented against you.

And then, you'll have a chance to make your defense. What will you say? Think it through. Does it satisfy you? It doesn't even satisfy you. How would you expect it to satisfy a righteous and a holy God if it doesn't satisfy you? Well, I know what some of you will say in defense. Some of you will say, "Well, now wait a minute. God, I didn't know which church to join. Those religious fellows never could get together. There was

the Baptist Church, the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, Church of God, Church of Christ, Episcopalian Church—I didn't know which church to join.” Do you know what He'll say to you? “I didn't say, ‘Believe on the Church.’ I said, *‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.’*” (Acts 16:31) Amen?

Someone will say, “Now, wait a minute, Lord. I'll tell you why I wasn't saved: it was Adrian Rogers. That's him. Listen, Lord, you should have heard him. I came to church on Sunday morning to a worship service, and he made me feel bad. Why, he waved his Bible around. He pounded the pulpit. He pointed his finger at me. He called me a sinner. He doesn't know what a fine person I am. He made me angry. I went away with a bad feeling rather than a good feeling when I went to church. That's why I'm not saved.” Well, the Lord will say to you, “I didn't say, ‘Believe on the preacher.’ I said, *‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.’*” (Acts 16:31)

Someone will say, “But, wait a minute—wait a minute. It was that Bellevue Baptist Church. There were hypocrites in that church.” Oh? Well, do tell. Let me tell you something, friend, He will say to you, “I didn't say, ‘Believe on the hypocrite,’ I said, *‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.’*” (Acts 16:31)

“But, wait a minute, Lord—wait a minute, Lord. I'll tell you why I wasn't saved: I wasn't going to walk down that aisle and take that counselor by the hand and give my heart to Jesus 'til I was sure I could live it.” “'Til you were sure you could live it? I didn't say, ‘Believe on yourself.’ I said, *‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.’*” (Acts 16:31)

“But, wait a minute, Lord. I didn't have time. I died suddenly—just like that. I didn't even have time to cry out and say, ‘God have mercy.’” And, God will take His candid camera and show you this worship service and say, “You had time that Sunday morning when my servant poured out his heart and begged you to give your heart to Jesus Christ.”

God's Word says, *“Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”* (Proverbs 27:1) *“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”* (2 Corinthians 6:2) *“To day if [you] will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”* (Hebrews 3:15; 4:7)

The evidence, the defense, and then the verdict—*“he [will] have judgment without mercy.”* (James 2:13) You will say, “O God, O God, have mercy!” And, the Lord Jesus Christ, with a face burning with purity and holiness, will say, *“[He that denies me] before men, [the same shall] I deny before [the] Father which is in heaven.”* (Matthew 10:33) *“Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”* (Matthew 25:41) And, the recording angel will be there and say, “Master, what shall I write?” And, Jesus will say, “Write L-O-S-T—lost.” “God have mercy!” “There is no mercy.” “God, let me have grace!” “You passed the day of grace.”

IV. The Sweetness of the Salvation

Now friends, the Bible says that there are some people who are going to have judgment without mercy. (James 2:13) That brings us to the last point in this simple message—not only the sovereignty of the Scripture, and not only the sinfulness of the sinner, and not only the severity of the sentence, but I want you to notice, in this context, the sweetness of the salvation. That's what makes our salvation so wonderful. That's what makes our salvation so sweet.

I want you to notice the last part of verse 13. And, if you had enough space in your Bible, you could write, "Hallelujah!" by it. Oh, listen, friend: *"For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment."* (James 2:13) Oh, thank God that's there, friend. There is God's divine escape clause for you and for me. *"Mercy rejoiceth against judgment."* (James 2:13) This verse literally means that mercy triumphs over judgment. Oh, no wonder the songwriter wrote, "Mercy there was great, and grace was free...at Calvary." (William Reed Newell) How thankful we are for the mercies of God—the sure and tender mercies!

Conclusion

Do you want the mercies of God? You may have them, but you must have them now. Do you want the grace of God? You may have it; you need it, but you must have it now. There'll be no mercy in that day. *"Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."* (2 Corinthians 6:2)

Thomas Hooker was a great Puritan preacher of yesteryear. He died in 1647. And, someone said to Thomas Hooker, "Brother Hooker, you are now going to the reward of your labors," just before he died. Thomas Hooker didn't like that at all. He shook his head and said, "Brother, I am going to receive mercy—mercy." And, I don't care who you are or what you've done, the only thing that you can hope to receive before the Judgment Bar of God is the mercy of God.

Let me tell you something, friend: theoretically, there are three ways you can go to heaven. Notice I said, "theoretically," because somebody's going to want to come up here and get in a big theological argument with me. Number one: You can die before you reach the age of accountability. Well, if you can understand what I've said, that won't do you any good. Understand? You see, it's like you're at the bat, and there are three strikes that you have before you're out. And, if you understand what I'm saying to you, that's strike one.

Now, number two—here's another way you could go to heaven: keep all the law and never sin in one point all of your life. Live a perfect life. Only theory—'cause you can't do it. No one ever has. No one ever can. No one ever will. Only One, Jesus, lived that way. But, theoretically...theoretically, that if you lived an absolutely perfect life—you

never sinned in thought, word, or deed—then you wouldn't need to be saved, see? Have you ever sinned? Nod your head. C'mon. Nod it! Strike two—strike two. See?

Now, there's one more opportunity that you have, and that is the mercy of God—the mercy of God—to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, to say, “O God, I'm lost, and I need to be saved. And, I don't deserve to be saved, but—hallelujah!—Jesus died in agony and blood for me on the cross. And, on the cross, He poured out His rich, red, royal blood, that through faith, in His name, I might be saved.”

Because [my] sinless Savior died

My [guilty] soul is counted free.

For God the just is satisfied

To look on Him and pardon me.

— CHARITIE L. BANCROFT

Isn't that wonderful? “Him who knew no sin God hath made to be sin for us, that we might be the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

A Funeral for a Dead Faith

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: August 11, 2002

Main Scripture Text: James 2:14–16

“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?”

JAMES 2:14

Outline

Introduction

- I. Words Without Works Are Worthless
- II. Profession Without Possession Is Profitless
- III. Form Without Force Is Fatal
 - A. Abraham
 - B. Rahab

Conclusion

Introduction

The Christian life is just summed up in grace, but the devil doesn't want you to know that. The devil doesn't want you to believe that. What the devil wants to do is to try to mix together grace and works. And when we try to mix together grace and works, then grace is not grace at all. The Bible says, “And if by grace, it is no more work, otherwise work is no more work. And if by work, it is no more grace: otherwise grace is no more grace.” What he means is, like oil and water, grace and works don't mix. Now, some people think that they can explain it with a smug look. They say being saved is like trying to cross a stream in a rowboat. If you pull on one oar, which is works, you will just go around in a circle this way. If you pull on the other oar, which is grace, you will just go in a circle this way. But if you take both oars, you will just cross the stream. It is a wonderful illustration, but it has a fatal flaw. The flaw is this: we are not going to heaven in a rowboat. We're going to heaven by the grace of God. And the music tonight that we have sung about speaks of God's amazing grace, grace greater than all of our sin. His grace is greater.

Now, having said that, we run into a problem. The problem is here in the book of James. And, as we read the book of James, it almost seems as if there is a contradiction. In James chapter 2, verse 14, James says this: “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith and have not works? Can faith save him? Or if

a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, depart in peace, be warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so, faith, if it hath not works, is dead”—d-e-a-d—“being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, I will show thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” And then, here, perhaps, is the hardest part of all of this to understand—verse 21: “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rehab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

Now, a careless reading of this scripture would seem to indicate that a person is saved by grace and by works. But this is not true. Now, it would almost seem that, if that is not true, the Bible contradicts itself. For example, put in your margin—and, if you have heard me preach on this before, your notes will already be in the margin—Romans chapter 4, verses 1 through 6. Here is what Paul said about Abraham. Now, remember that James says, in verse 21, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works?” But now, notice what Paul says—Romans chapter 4, verse 1: “What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justify, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.”

Now, I am telling you, a careless reading of these two verses would seem like there is a contradiction. Now, I want to say at the outset, so that there be no stutter, no stammer, no contradiction, at all; we are saved by grace through faith, and by nothing else. It is grace all the way. I have told you that grace—g-r-a-c-e—is God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense. By the way, grace is exclusively a Christian doctrine. God has, the Lord Jesus has, cornered the market on grace. We have a monopoly on grace. It is exclusively a Christian doctrine. You cannot save yourself. Good works, a little or a lot, don’t save. They don’t help save. You could no more save yourself by good works than if you were drowning could reach up with your hand, take yourself by the hair, and lift

yourself out of the water. You cannot do it.

Martin Luther, the great reformer that led in the Protestant Reformation in 1517, had been studying the Scriptures, especially the book of Romans. He was in Rome on the Santa Scala, the holy stairs, and climbing those stairs on his knees, and saying his prayers, and doing penance for sin. But he had been studying the book of Romans, and the Scripture burst through to him, in Romans chapter 1 and verse 17: “For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” And this truth burst aflame in his heart, and in his life and Martin Luther came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and was born again.

Now, what is the answer to this conundrum, to this riddle, to this enigma, this seeming contradiction? Well, may I say that the Bible never contradicts itself. There is no contradiction between Brother Paul and Brother James. Sometimes men may seem to be in an argument, but they are describing things from a different viewpoint. And what Paul and James are talking about are the head and tail of the same coin. Now, many times, people don’t understand what it is all about. What Paul is talking about is faith before God. What James is talking about is faith before men. What Paul is talking about is a know-so faith. And what James is talking about is a show-so faith.

One time I had an experience to talk to the former President, George Herbert Walker Bush, sitting in his library, about the Lord Jesus Christ. And in that library was Dr. D. James Kennedy. He was sitting there with me, and Charles Stanley, and Jerry Falwell. And you might call them the four spiritual laws. And we were sitting there talking about faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And George Herbert Walker Bush was asked this question: What are you trusting to get you to heaven? And he said, “I believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for my sin. I believe He is the Son of God. I believe He paid my sin debt with His blood. I believe that He was buried, raised again from dead. I put my faith and my trust in Him, and I am trusting Him for my salvation.” And I was about to say A+, but then he said, “I also endeavor to live by the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule.”

Well, D. James Kennedy, you know, who is the guru for Evangelism Explosion, and who makes it implicitly and explicitly clear that salvation is by grace, had the temerity to say, “Sir, I want to tell you that keeping the Ten Commandments and living by the Sermon on the Mount and the Golden Rule has nothing to do with your salvation.” Mr. Bush said, “I disagree with you.” Now, he is sitting with the four of us, sitting there. He said, “I disagree with you. Do you mean to tell me that a man can profess faith in God and then not change his life?” Mr. Kennedy said, “Well, of course it would change his life. If he has been saved, it will change his life. But he does not do those things in order to be saved, but because he has been saved.” Mr. Bush said, “Well, if you put it that way, I agree with you.”

Now, I like that. First of all, I like the fact that he believed that, if you believe, it is going to change your life. Now, Mr. Kennedy was talking more like the Apostle Paul and Mr. Bush was talking more like James. And there was no real contradiction, if you understood what both of them were talking about. You see Paul is talking about faith before God. James is speaking of faith before men. The key is in verse 18. Look at it: “A man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me...”—underscore that—“show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.”

Now, Paul speaks of the root of salvation. James speaks of the fruit of salvation. Now, the root is beneath the ground. The fruit is above the ground. God can see the root; man can only see the fruit. Paul speaks of the foundation of our faith. James speaks of the building that is built on that foundation. Paul is speaking of that which is inward. James is speaking of that which is outward. Paul is speaking of the provision of our salvation. James is speaking of the proof of our salvation. Paul is talking about the means of our salvation. James is talking about the marks of our salvation. Paul is talking about a know-so salvation. James is talking about a show-so salvation.

Now, we are going to be talking about a dead faith tonight. And the title of the message is, “A Funeral for a Dead Faith.” All right now, James here is talking about faith that is dead faith. And let me tell you three epitaphs that I would put on the tombstone of a dead faith.

I. Words Without Works Are Worthless

Number one: words without works are worthless. Write it down: Words without works are worthless. Go back now to verse 14: “What doth it profit a man though a man say...”—underscore that—“though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?” Literally, the Greek reads, can that faith save him? James is not saying that we are not saved by faith. But he is saying, a faith that does not change your life, can that faith save him? Then he gives an illustration: “If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful for the body; what doth it profit? Even so, faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.” Words without works are worthless.

Now, what James is saying is, what a man says is not necessarily a fact. Many years ago, I heard a story about Abraham Lincoln that I have never forgotten. It is said that Abraham Lincoln one time asked a little boy, if a dog has four legs and then you call his tail a leg, then how many would he have? The little boy said, he would have five. Then Abraham Lincoln said no, he would just have four. No matter what you call his tail, it is still a tail. He only has four legs. No matter what a man says about his faith, if he doesn't have real faith, it is not real faith. It is possible to have profession without

possession. Repeating words never saves a soul. Rattling off a little prayer will not save you. Words without works are worthless.

I was in a hospital one time visiting and praying with a patient. And my wife says, “Adrian, if you don’t want people to hear you, don’t say it, because even when you whisper, it bounces off the restaurant walls,” and said, “People can hear you all over this restaurant.” And so, I was praying with this lady, and, when I finished, I heard a feeble voice from across the hall saying, “Come see me too.” I thought they were talking to a nurse. I went on, and after a while, the pitiful cry came and said, “Come,” and said, “Come see me too.” And I called back across the hall. I said, “Are you speaking to me?” She said, “Are you a minister?” I said, “Yes.” She said, “Could you please come see me too?” I said, “Certainly.” I went over there, and there was a pale lady whose blood was gone from her face. She had that sallow look and she was becoming jaundiced. And her white hair was spread out on the pillow, and there were dark circles under her eyes. And, if you have been around people who are dying, it was obvious she was very near to death. And she said, “I am dying, and I am not ready to meet God. Can you help me?” I said, “Yes, yes, I can.” And I shared the Lord Jesus Christ with her, and told her the way of salvation. Then I said, “I want to lead you in a prayer, and I want you to pray these words after me.” And I prayed the sinner’s prayer. And she prayed dutifully and faithfully the prayer after me. And I opened my eyes, and I expected to see a look of radiance and peace, but she had a tortured look on her face. And she said, “But I don’t see how just saying that can do any good.” And I said, “Precious lady, you are so right. Just saying that can’t do any good at all. But,” I said, “if you will mean it, it will save your soul.” I said, “Let’s try it again. And this time, don’t just say it—talk to God. And I led her this time in the sinner’s prayer, and she prayed with deep emotion, and said, “O God, I trust you; I really do, with all of my heart. Save me.” And I opened my eyes this time and looked at her: there was a radiance, and a peace, and a joy. And I said, “Did He do it?” She said, “Indeed, He did.” This is what James is talking about here. Words cannot save. Pious platitudes cannot get you to heaven. Words without works are worthless: I would put that on the tombstone as we bury a dead faith.

II. Profession Without Possession Is Profitless

Here is something else I would put on there: Profession without possession is profitless. Now, continue to read here, beginning in verse 18: “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, I will show thee my faith by my works. Thou believest there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou not know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?”

Now, the devil professes God. Did you know that the devil professes faith in God? He does not possess the Lord Jesus Christ. He has never bowed the knee to Jesus

Christ, but the devil professes faith in God, at least, that he believes that God exists. As a matter of fact, the devil has more faith than some theological professors I know. He is more orthodox than some. Let me give you some scriptures. And I want you to put these down. I want you to see the devil's profession of faith. For example, in Matthew chapter 8, verses 28 and 29, Jesus was there ministering by the Sea of Galilee, and here is what the Scripture says: "And when he was come to the other side to the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils"—that is, demons—"coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way." That is, they were terrorizing the neighborhood. "And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" The devil professes that Jesus is the Son of God. So you say, well, a man makes a profession of faith, he is saved. Well, it all depends. The devil is certainly not saved. He professes that Jesus is the Son of God. Let me give you another scripture—Mark chapter 1, verses 23 and 24: "And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God." The devil believes that Jesus is the Son of God. He believes that He is the Holy One of God.

And then a third scripture—Luke 4, verse 41: "The devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art the Christ the Son of God." Sounds like he would get an "A" in seminary in Systematic Theology. You are the Messiah, the Son of God. "And he rebuking them suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ"—that He was Messiah. So what does this tell us? It tells us that you can have profession without possession. Is that not correct? That you can know the facts of the gospel. The Bible, in the book of James, says the devil believes and trembles. The word tremble here is the word that literally means to shutter. The word means literally to stand up straight. That is what it literally means. Like the hair stands up on the back of your neck when you are afraid. The devil trembles. Real faith does not cause you to shutter. It brings peace. "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"—Romans 5:1.

You see, the devil is very orthodox in many ways. Suppose the devil were to try to join Bellevue Baptist Church, and we question him, and we say, "Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God?" "Yes, I do." "Do you believe He is the Messiah?" "Yes, I do." "Do you believe He is holy?" "Yes, I do." "Do you believe He was born of a virgin?" "Yes, I do." "Do you believe He died on the cross?" "Yes, I do." "Do you believe He was raised from the dead?" "Yes, I do." "Will you work in the church?" I will be glad to. I will be a deacon, if you will let me." "I will be glad to fill the pulpit." The Bible says, Satan is transformed as an angel of light. And he could pass all of these tests, but he is not born

again. Devil, I have asked you a number of questions; let me ask you one more question: “Will you bow the knee to Jesus Christ and crown Him King of Kings and Lord of Lords?” “I will not—I will not.”

I am telling you, churches are filled with people who have gone through a little routine, who have gone through a little theological exercise, and they think because of their profession they have possession. But they have never bowed the knee to Jesus Christ and made Him Lord, as we have sung tonight: King of Kings and Lord of Lords. They are going to miss heaven by some eighteen inches. They have it here, but they don't have it here. And if we have a funeral for a dead faith, I would put that on the tombstone, that profession without possession is profitless. What doth it profit a man?

III. Form Without Force Is Fatal

Now, here is the third thing I would say on that tombstone: that form without force is fatal. Begin reading again in verse 20: “But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead.”

Now, a man without saving faith is still dead in his trespasses and sin. Now, what is the difference between dead faith and true faith? You see, a man with true faith, a Christian, is somebody who has the life of God in him. Now, listen carefully, so you won't get confused. You are saved by grace alone, but the grace that saves is never alone. You are saved by grace alone, but the grace that saves is never alone. You are not saved by faith and works, but you are saved by a faith that works—a faith that works. You are not saved by barren belief and a futile faith. You are saved by a faith that is transformational. You see, James is not saying that works save. But what he is saying is that real salvation produces works. Now, just keep your Bibles open there, and put a bookmark there, and go to Ephesians chapter 2, verses 8, 9 and 10. And if you will get these verses correct, you will never get skewed; you will never get confused: “For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God had before ordained that we should walk in them.”

Do you remember your high school English? Do you know what a preposition is?

There are three prepositions here. If you will keep them straight, you will keep your theology straight. By the way, I shared this with President Bush. These three prepositions are by, through, and unto. Let's say them: by, through, unto. Say them one more time: by, through, and unto. You are saved by grace through faith unto good works. Got it? Say, got it. By grace, through faith, unto good works. And here you see that is what James is saying. If you have real faith, it is going to be unto good works. You are not saved by good works. We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works. We are not saved by good works. We are saved unto good works. Now, James is a good teacher. And James gives two examples and one illustration. And with those two examples and the one illustration, we will close the message tonight and have the Lord's Supper.

A. **Abraham**

Now, the first example that he gives is Abraham. Beginning in verse 21 again, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith worked, wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he is called the Friend of God."

Now, slow down and think with me. In Genesis chapter 15—put this down—verse 6, there the Bible records that Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness. That's when he got saved. That's when God said, Abraham, I've put you in my book. You are righteous. Why? Because he believed God. He put his faith in the coming Messiah. He believed in God. The Bible says of Abraham, Abraham saw that Jesus was speaking, and was glad.

Now, thirty years later—are you listening?—thirty years later, thirty years after, it was imputed unto him for righteousness; thirty years after, God said, you are saved; you are righteous—thirty years later, thirty years after he offered Isaac on Mount Moriah. That wasn't when he got saved. That's simply when he showed he was saved. His willingness to offer Isaac did not save him. It was not the means of his salvation. It was the mark of his salvation. It was not the root of his salvation. It was the fruit of his salvation. If you read this in the Amplified Bible, it says, Abraham was shown to be justified by his works—he was shown to be justified. That is, before men, you could see. You couldn't see what happened between Abraham and God, when Abraham believed God. But you could certainly see, had you been there, what happened on Mount Moriah. And so, that's the first illustration. It wasn't that Abraham was saved when he offered up Isaac. He had been saved for thirty years. But, before men, you could see his works; you could see what he was doing.

B. Rahab

The other illustration is Rahab the harlot. Look, if you will, in verse 25 here. And, “Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way.” This comes from Joshua chapter 2. Rahab was a harlot. She was a streetwalker. She became a saint. She was an enemy of God, and she became a part of the lifeline of the Lord Jesus Christ. What is James saying? This woman had a life that was transformed. Talk is cheap. That is the reason I say, if your religion hasn’t changed your life, you ought to change your religion. Rahab was not saved because she cleaned up her life. Just the opposite: she cleaned up her life because she was saved.

Now, those are the two examples, and then he gives an illustration. And here is the illustration—look at it: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” Now, what good is a body of truth without the life of the spirit? What can a corpse do? Now, I don’t want to frighten you. Do my imitation of Elvis. Now, I want to tell you something. In that position, there is not a spirit in me; I am dead. That’s it. I may have a nice body, which I do. And there I am, dead. No spirit. Now, here I am walking around. I can do all kinds of things. See this. I can walk, I can move, and everything. Now, I want to ask you a question. Why am I alive? Because I am walking around? No. I walk around because I am alive. Why does a man do what he does spiritually? In order to be saved? No, because he is saved. What good is the body of truth without the spirit? Now, look at the illustration again. He is saying here the work that a human body does doesn’t give it life; the work that a human body does reveals life. Without life the body cannot work. Therefore, the body without works is dead. And then, let’s apply that spiritually: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

No corpse can work his way into life. Do you understand that? No corpse can work his way into life. He just can’t do it. He is dead. He has got to receive the life before he works. So the works are the root and not the fruit. And the works are outward; the faith is inward. The works demonstrate. And so, James says, you show me your faith without your works; I’ll show you my faith by my works. And words without works are worthless. Profession without possession is profitless. And faith without force is fatal. We are not saved by faith and works; we are saved by faith that works, not just simply by professing words. You say, well, I am saved because I know the plan of salvation. You are not saved by the plan of salvation; you are saved by the Man of Salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ. The devil knows the plan, but he has never bowed the knee to the Man. Now, I believe there are multitudes who are marching to hell who are theologically correct but have never, ever really trusted Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior.

Conclusion

Every road has two ditches. And the devil doesn't care which side of the road he wrecks your car on. On the one side is the ditch of those who think they can work their way to heaven, that God is somehow making a list, checking it twice, like Santa Claus. And when we die, he is going to see if our good works outweigh our bad works. And so, on the one hand, there are those who try to be justified by works.

The other ditch is just as dangerous. There are those who say, well, since I am saved by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, I have an intellectual faith, I believe that Jesus died on the cross, I believe the facts of the gospel, and so therefore, I just accept that intellectually, casually. But they never bow the knee to Jesus Christ. They never really trust Christ as personal Savior. Over here are those who are trying to work their way to heaven. They will never do it. Over here are those who never really have received Jesus Christ as Lord. They simply have a say-so salvation. But they don't have a know-so salvation. They have never trusted the Lord Jesus Christ. Real salvation is salvation by grace through faith unto good works. Have you got that? You understand it?

All right, if you do now, bow your head in prayer. How many of you can say, Pastor Rogers, I have repented of my sin; I have trusted Jesus Christ as my personal Savior and Lord? Now, I don't have just a mere profession. Christ has come into me. There is a transformation that has taken place and therefore, it is evident by my life that I have been saved. Those who live around me know that I am changed. Those that I work with know that I am changed. They can see Jesus Christ in me. They may not agree with it. It may even irritate them, but they know that they know there has been a change in me. And I know that there has been a change in me. You may be a moral person before you got saved, but salvation will make a bad man good and a good man better. It will change you. It will change you. How many will say, Pastor Rogers, I don't just have religion; I have reality? I don't have a dead faith; I have a living, transformational faith. And, when I lift my hand in a moment, I am not doing it boastfully, but I doing it thankfully. And I bless the God who has saved me by His grace and transformed my life. If you have been changed by the grace of God, and you believe that you have a living, vital faith, would you give God the glory and lift your hand? Hold it up. Thank you. Now, put your hand down.

If tonight you would say, Pastor Rogers, the message has caused me to think, and I am not really certain that I have more than an intellectual faith, maybe a dead faith, I have never had a transformational faith, I have never really received salvation, because it has never showed in my life; though I may be a baptized member of this church or some other church—or maybe not—but I don't have that full assurance, and I want it; I want to know that I know that I know that I am saved; and, Pastor Rogers, in the prayer that you are about to pray, would you remember me in prayer? I am going to pray a

prayer in just a moment for those of you who are concerned about your soul. And I am not going to point you out, or embarrass you in any way whatever—will not call your name; nobody is going to come to you—this is between you, me, and the Lord. But if you are honestly, earnestly concerned about your soul, so am I, and I want to pray for you, and pray with you about it, and just pray that God would open your heart and mind that you might get it eternally settled. You might say, Pastor Rogers, if a person can know that they are saved, I want to know it. I really do. I wouldn't be here tonight if I didn't really want to know it. So, I wish you would pray for me. While heads are bowed and eyes are closed, this is between you, me, and the Lord. Would you just slip up your hand, and say, yes, pray for me? Yes. Yes. Others. Hold it up high. Don't be embarrassed to do it. I am looking around. Pray for me. I want to know that I am saved. I am looking way back in the back, and I can see under the balcony. Slip up your hand, if you want me to pray for you back there. Heads are bowed and eyes are closed; down here in the front, at the sides, I am looking. God bless you. Are there others? Pray for me, Pastor Rogers. I want to know, I really want to know, that I am saved. Slip up your hand, hold it up high, and then take it down, when I say to. Anyone else? Slip it up.

“Father God, if there are hands that I have not seen, surely You have seen them. Lord, I thank You for these who have lifted their hand. And, Lord, I am aware tonight that there are those who don't have assurance and are even intimidated to lift their hand. But Father, I pray tonight, I pray in the name of Jesus, for each hand, each person that that hand represents, that tonight they might humbly and sweetly, with a living faith, trust in the Living Lord, and be saved, and receive life, O my God. Lord God, we can't save anybody, and preaching cannot save anyone, and church membership doesn't save. Lord, only You can save. And Lord, I pray tonight that You would give to these a living faith, not a dead faith. And Father, that they might get it settled tonight.”

Precious friend, if you lifted your hand for prayer, or even if you didn't but you know that you should have, would you pray this kind of a prayer? “Dear God, I am a sinner, and I am lost, and I need to be saved. Jesus, You died to save me. You promised to save me, if I would trust You. I do trust You now, right now, like a child. Come into my heart. Forgive my sin, and save me. Thank You that You paid for my sin with Your shed blood on the cross. I believe it, and I receive it. Thank You, Jesus. Amen and amen.”

Autopsy of a Dead Faith

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: March 12, 2000

Main Scripture Text: James 2:14–26

“Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.”

JAMES 2:17

Outline

Introduction

I. A Profitless Profession

II. A Barren Belief

III. A Fatal Faith

A. Abraham

B. Rahab

Conclusion

Introduction

Would you turn to James, chapter 2. Now, when we look in the Book of James, we find a lot of straight talk. James does not beat around the bush. But he says something in the passage that we’re about to study, something very startling, because it almost seems—and a careless reading would make us feel—that James is saying that we’re saved by good works. But, if you know anything about Christian doctrine, you know that is not true. We’re saved by grace alone, in Christ alone, by faith alone. That’s what the Bible teaches. And yet, I want you to listen to what James says. And, by the way, many false cults will use this passage of Scripture because they do not understand it, to show that salvation is not by grace, but, at least, it is a mixture of grace and works.

Well, let’s read it, and then we’re going to look at it. Again, I want to tell you that the title of our message tonight is “The Autopsy of a Dead Faith.” Here’s what James asks: “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding, ye give them not those things which are needful for the body, what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works; show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well. The devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?”

Was not Abraham, our father, justified by works, when he had offered Isaac, his son, upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God. Ye see, then, how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise, also was not Rahab, the harlot, justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

Now, that’s a passage of Scripture that we’re going to have to reckon with. It seems, casually, that James is saying that people are saved, justified, made right by works. Well, if that is true, there is a direct contradiction in the Bible. Now, just hold your place there in the Book of James, and I’m going to direct you to the apostle Paul. It’s almost as if James and Paul are having an argument. In Romans chapter 4, verses 1 through 6. Remember, James has just talked about Abraham being justified by works. You read that here in the passage of Scripture, verse 21: “Was not Abraham, our father, justified by works...” Now, listen to what Paul says in Romans chapter 4, verse 1: “What shall we say, then, that Abraham, our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath he hath whereof to glory, but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now, to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.” Do you see what is happening here? Do you see the seeming contradiction? Do you see the seeming confusion? It’s like James is saying one thing and Paul is saying another. Now, Paul, the mighty apostle, makes it plain that works, a little or a lot, do not save, and they do not help save. And another passage of Scripture is Romans 11 and verse 6—Paul, after saying we’re saved by grace, says this: “ And, if by grace, it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, it is no more grace, otherwise work is no more work.” Paul is saying, “Make up your mind. You can’t be saved by grace and works. If it’s by grace, works don’t have anything to do with it. If it’s by work, grace has nothing to do with it.” That’s Romans 11 and verse 6.

Now, we are saved—I want to say emphatically, clearly, without stutter, stammer, apology, and fear of contradiction—salvation is by grace alone. Now, listen. *Grace is God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense*. Our faith is the only faith in the world that has the message of grace. God has cornered the market on grace. You are saved by the grace of God. It is the sheer gift of God. You could no more save yourself by works than this young man could do what I’m going to ask him to do.

Greg, come over here just a minute. You're an athlete. He doesn't know I'm going to do this. But you're an athlete. He is. He's a great athlete, so I want you to do this. I want you to reach down and put your hands underneath your shoes. Just go ahead. You can bend, you bend your knees. Now, lift yourself off the ground. Impossible. Thank you. All right, he can't do that. You could not save yourself by works any more than he could lift himself off the ground by pulling, or, if a drowning man is drowning, could reach up and grab himself by the hair and pull himself out of the water. That is absolutely, totally impossible. You're not saved by works.

As a matter of fact, we had something called the Protestant Reformation that is based on this entire truth that salvation is by grace. There was a Roman Catholic monk, a priest, a scholar, whose name was Martin Luther. And, back in the 1500s, Martin Luther was trying to be justified by works. And he was in that great basilica, in Saint John's Basilica in Rome. He was on the stairs they call the Scala Sancta, the Holy Stairs, thought to have been the stairs that Jesus ascended in Pilate's judgment hall. Martin Luther was on his knees, doing penance, trying to pray, trying to be right with God, and praying on every stair as he went up, trying, by works, to be justified before God. And he had been studying the Book of Romans, and the Scripture burst upon his heart, and he read to himself again that we are justified by faith—Romans chapter 1, verse 17: "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith." You're not saved by, works, but you're saved by the grace of God, and it is faith that brings that grace into your heart and into your life.

Well, is there a contradiction then between James and Paul? Well, no. James and Paul are talking about the same thing, but from a different viewpoint. There is no contradiction here, but it is heads and tails of the same thing. So many times we do get confused about these things.

Some years ago, I had the privilege to be with the former President, George Bush. And I was sitting in his library in his home. He was Vice President at that time. And I had in there with me, or we had together, Jerry Falwell, Charles Stanley, Jim Kennedy, and Adrian Rogers, and the Vice President. We're sitting in his library. So he's sitting there with the four spiritual laws. And we're talking, and the subject of faith came up, and salvation. And somebody asked the question, "Tell us about your faith." He said, "I'll tell you very clearly." He said, "I believe that my only hope of heaven is the fact that Jesus died for me on the cross, and I have put my faith in Jesus Christ, and I am trusting Him to get me to heaven, because He died for me and paid for my sins on the cross." Well, that sounded very, very wonderful. And, Kennedy asked him the diagnostic question. He said, "No disrespect, Mr. Vice President, but if you were to stand before God and He were to say to you, 'Why should I let you into My heaven?' what would you say if you were to suddenly die?" He would say, "I would tell Him, I've trusted Jesus Christ as my

personal Lord and Savior, and I would also tell Him that I have endeavored to live by the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount.” Well, when he said that, the light went off in Mr. Kennedy’s head, and he said, “Now, Mr. Vice President,” he said, “Keeping the Ten Commandments and living by the Sermon on the Mount have nothing to do with it. You’re saved by the grace of God.” George Bush said, “I disagree with you. Do you mean to tell me that a man can say that he believes in God and it doesn’t change his life?” He said, “I believe when a man is saved, when he becomes a Christian, it will show up in his life. You’ll be able to see it. It’s going to change his life.” Mr. Kennedy said, “Well, if you’re talking about that, I’ll have to agree with you. I was just simply saying those things don’t save you.” And the Vice President said, “Well, if you put it that way, then I will agree with you, but I believe that a man’s faith ought to change his life.” And Mr. George Bush was absolutely correct. And I appreciated what he had to say. And I appreciated he knew more than just simply saying, “I believe is what it is that shows a man’s true faith.”

Now, what you have in Paul and what you have in James is the difference between Jim Kennedy and George Bush in that library that night. Let me explain it to you. Paul is speaking of faith before God; James is speaking of faith before men. The key is in verse 18—look in verse 18: “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works; show me thy faith...” James is talking about the kind of faith that you can see, and he’s talking about a show-so faith. Paul is talking about a know-so faith. Paul speaks of the root of our salvation; James is speaking of the fruit of our salvation. Now, the root is beneath the ground, but the fruit is above the ground. Paul is speaking of the foundation of our faith; James is speaking of the building that is built on that foundation. Paul is speaking of that which is inward; James is speaking of that which is outward. Paul is speaking of the provision of our salvation; James is speaking of the proof of our salvation. Paul speaks of the means of our salvation; James speaks of the marks of our salvation. Paul speaks of a know-so salvation; James speaks of a show-so salvation.

Now, what is wrong with the kind of faith that some people have that has not changed their life? James says it is a dead faith. Look, if you will, in verse 14: “What doth it profit, brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and hath not works? Can faith save him?” The literal Greek is, “Can that faith save him? Can that kind of faith save him?”

I. A Profitless Profession

Now, we’re going to do an autopsy on a dead faith, and I want you to notice three marks of a dead faith, the faith that cannot save. First of all, it is a Profitless—a Profitless—Profession. Begin, again, in verse 14, and read through verse 17. Now, look at it: “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and hath not works?” Now,

notice, it is a profitless profession. A man says he has faith, and he has not works. “Can faith save him?” Notice, again, “can that faith save him—that kind of faith?” James is not saying that we’re not saved through faith. He’s just saying, “Can that faith save him?” Hello. And he gives an illustration. Here’s the illustration: “If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding, ye give them not those things which are needful for the body, what doth it profit? Even so, faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.” Now, notice that the key word is say: “though a man say he hath faith...”

What people say is not necessarily a fact. Remember the old story. Lincoln asked a little boy if a dog has four legs and you call his tail a leg, then how many does he have? And the little boy said five. He said, “No, he still just has four legs. It doesn’t matter what you call his tail—it’s still a tail.” You can call it a leg if you want to. If a man says he has faith, that doesn’t mean that he has faith. It is possible to have profession without possession. Repeating words to a hungry person cannot warm them and fill them. Also, the mere repeating of words can’t save a life.

I was in a hospital, witnessing and praying with someone, when I heard a voice say, “Come and see me, too.” I wondered if they were really talking to me. I thought maybe someone was calling a nurse. So I went on ministering, and the voice said, “Come and see me, too.” And it was someone in a room across the hall. They heard my voice in the hospital across the room. Joyce tells me, “Adrian, if you don’t want it heard, don’t say it.” She said, “People can hear you all over the restaurant.” And that it true, because I was not talking that loud, but my voice had just kind of carried across that hall. And I said out loud, “Are you talking to me?” She said, “Yes, come see me, too.” So, after I finished ministering in this one room, I went across the hall, and there was a lady. And, if you’ve ever seen people about to die, especially of some malignancies, this person had an ashen look. Her gray hair was spread out on her pillow and death was written on her face. And she said, “I am about to die. Can you help me? I don’t know God. I don’t want to die without God.” I said, “Yes, dear lady, I can help you.” And I took the Bible and I explained how Jesus Christ died on the cross for her sins. And I told her if she would ask Jesus into her heart and pray that He would save her. And then, I led her in a prayer. And she prayed after me. “Dear God—Dear God—I’m a sinner—I’m a sinner—I’m lost—I’m lost—I need to be saved—I need to be saved—I want to be saved—I want to be saved—Come into my heart—Come into my heart—Forgive my sin—Forgive my sin—Cleanse me—Cleanse me—Save me—Save me. And she prayed that. I opened my eyes, and I expected to see a smile of joy on her face, but she had an anguished look, distraught look. And she looked at me, and she said, “But I don’t see how just saying that can do any good.” And I said, “Lady, you are absolutely, 100% correct. Just saying that can do no good, but if you will believe it and receive it, He’ll save you.” And I

said, “Let’s do it again. This time, don’t say it; pray it. Mean it from your heart. Trust Him to save you. And, when you say the words, do what you’re saying.” And we prayed it again. And I said, “And I trust You to save me.” And she said, “And I trust You to save me.” When I looked up, she had the glory of God on her face, and she had come from just saying so and repeating words to really receiving Jesus Christ as her personal Savior. I read, shortly after, in the paper where she died, and I expect confidently to meet her in heaven. And what James is saying is what that woman was saying: just repeating words does not change a life. “If a man say he hath faith...” Just saying so is not the answer. And so, what he’s talking about here is, first of all, as he does an autopsy, he finds, number one, a Profitless Profession. Pious platitudes will not get you to heaven.

II. A Barren Belief

Now, here’s the second thing. Not only is a Profitless Profession; it therefore follows that it is a Barren Belief. Look now, beginning in verse 18, and read verses 18 and 19: “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works; show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well. The devils also believe, and tremble.” Now, he’s talking not only about your profession, but your belief. And he says, “You can believe in an orthodox way, and go to hell.” Your belief can be a barren belief. There are some people who count that on the fact that they are orthodox and they go to a Bible-believing church to get them to heaven, and yet they have no more real faith than the devil himself. As a matter of fact, the devil is more orthodox than some ministers I know. I’m serious. Let me show you what the demons believe, and you get out a pencil and write these verses down. And, by the way, the Bible says, “the devils believe and tremble.” The word tremble here has the idea of standing up straight. It’s like if you get frightened and the hair stands up on the back of your neck. It has the idea of shuddering. Listen to these scriptures, talking about the devil.

When Jesus was here in His earthly ministry, Matthew chapter 8, beginning in verse 28: “And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, there met him two possessed with devils”—and, by the way, any time in the King James you see the word devils, plural, it means demons. There’s only one devil and many demons—“coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man may pass by that way. And, behold, they cried out—these demons—saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?” They knew that Jesus was the Son of God, and they knew that He is the judge, the jury, and the executioner of all righteousness and justice. They knew that. These demons knew that.

And then look, if you will, in Mark 1, verses 23 and 24: “And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit;—that is, this man was possessed of a demon—and he cried out, Saying, Let us alone! What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? We know who thou art the Holy One of God.” That’s what we sang about—the Holy One of God. We were talking tonight about the holiness of God. And this demon-possessed man said, “We know who You are, the Holy One of God.” These are demons speaking.

Luke 4, verse 41: “And devils came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art the Christ,—that is, the Messiah—the Son of God. And he, rebuking them—he, rebuking them—suffered them not to speak; for they knew that he was Christ.” Pretty good theology—pretty good theology when you see that He is the Holy One. He is the Messiah. He is the Son of God. That’s what James says: “the devils believe and tremble.” Yet, you’ll not meet them in heaven. Why? They’ve never put their faith—true faith—in Jesus Christ.

Suppose the devil wanted to join Bellevue Baptist Church—he walks down the aisle now; takes human form, walks down the aisle. He’s coming down—and one of our ministers greets him, and hands him off to one of our deacons, and they go back there in the Welcome Center. So they sit down, and they say, “Well, Mr. Diablo, may I ask you a question? Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God?” “Oh, yes, I do.” “Do you believe He was born of a virgin?” “Oh, yes, I believe that very much. Yes, I believe in the virgin birth.” “Well, do you believe He died on the cross?” “Oh, yes, certainly. I do believe He died on the cross. Yes, siree, I believe that with all of my heart.” “Well, do you believe He was raised from the dead?” “Yes, siree, I believe that. I believe He walked out of that tomb.” “Mr. Diablo, that’s very wonderful. Mr. Diablo, if you come into Bellevue Baptist Church, will you be a good member? Will you be willing to work in the church?” “Oh, yes, I’d be very happy. As a matter of fact, I’ll serve as a deacon, if you’ll elect me. I’d be glad to sing in the choir. I’ll be glad to do all kinds of work. Why, you’ll think I’m an angel of light. Yes, I’ll be glad to do all of that. As a matter of fact, I will be happy to fill the pulpit anytime the pastor is absent.” By the way, one time when I was preaching, a little boy came up to me after the service and he said, “Preacher, that was a good sermon.” He said, “When you were up there preaching, I could see the devil just as plain.” “Do you believe that He’s the Son of God?” “Yes.” “Do you believe He’s the Messiah?” “Yes.” “Do you believe He was born of a virgin?” “Yes.” “You believe He was raised from the dead.” “Yes.” “Do you believe all of these things?” “Yes.” “Will you work in the church?” “Yes.” “One more question, Mr. Diablo. Will you bow your knee and confess that He is Lord?” “No, I will not.” He never has, and he never will. They believe, they tremble, but they do not have saving faith. You know this word tremble, as I say, says to make the hair stand up on the back of your neck. What does saving faith bring?

It doesn't bring fear; it brings peace. Romans chapter 5, verse 1: "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

III. A Fatal Faith

Now, what have I said? It is this kind of faith, this dead faith, this faith that does not save: it is a Profitless Profession. It is a Barren Belief, the same kind of belief that the devil has. And, thirdly, it is, therefore, a Fatal Faith. Now, continue to read. Look in verse 20: "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" It is fatal. "Was not Abraham, our father, justified by works, when he had offered Isaac, his son, upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God. Ye see, then, that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." It almost sounds like James is arguing with himself in verses 23 and 24. "Likewise, also was not Rahab, the harlot, justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?" Now, get to the bottom line, and here it is: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." It is a fatal, a dead, a fruitless faith. Now, the man with this kind of faith, therefore, is still in his trespasses and in his sin. The difference between the man that James is describing and the man that Paul is describing is life. A person who has Christ in him has the light of God in him. I want to say it one more time: We are saved by faith alone, in grace alone, in Jesus alone. But, listen. The faith that saves is never alone. We are not saved by faith and works; we are saved by faith that works. Not faith and works; it's all by grace. Remember, Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 9: "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." You're not saved by works. "Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works."

If you remember your high school English, remember what a preposition is. And I want to give you three prepositions that are found in Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 9, that will clear this up crystal clear. By the way, I shared these with President George Bush—three prepositions. And it is by, through, and unto—by, through, and unto. "For by grace as ye saved,"—by grace—"through faith, unto good works." Not by good works; by grace, through faith, unto good works. You're not saved by good works, but good works display your faith. James is saying, "Show me your faith without your works. I'll show you my faith by my works." It's unto good works. I cannot work my soul to save, that work my Lord has done. But I will work like any slave, for the love of God's dear Son.

A. Abraham

Now, James gives us two examples and one illustration. And with those two examples

and one illustration we'll come to a conclusion tonight. What are the two examples he gives? First of all, he gives the example of Abraham. And, in verses 21 through 24, he says, "Was not Abraham, our father, justified by works, when he had offered Isaac, his son, upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God." Well, when did this happen? When Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Did that happen when he offered Isaac upon the altar? No. It happened thirty years before that—thirty years before that. In Genesis chapter 15 and verse 6, the Bible says over in the Book of Genesis, "And he believed God, and it counted unto him for righteousness." I mean, when God speaks to him and tells him His plans, and of His love and His sovereign grace, and Abraham says, "God, I believe You," at that moment, God says, "All right. You're justified. It's counted unto you for righteousness." Then, thirty years later, in Genesis 22, he offers up Isaac. Now, what's he saying? All James is saying is this: that when Abraham offered up Isaac, he showed that what happened back there in Genesis 15 was real. It didn't make it real. No. It was not the means of his salvation; it was the mark of his salvation. The Amplified Bible says, "Abraham was shown to be justified by works." And I think that is right. That's one illustration. And there's no real contradiction between Paul and James concerning Abraham. Remember that Paul is talking about a know-so salvation; James is talking about a show-so salvation. Paul is talking about the root, and James is talking about the fruit.

B. **Rahab**

Now, he uses another illustration—Rahab—in verse 25. Look at it: "Likewise, also was not Rahab, the harlot, justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?" Now, if you read about Rahab in Joshua chapter 2, you're going to learn this Shady Lady of Jericho went from a streetwalker to a saint, when she believed God and trusted the Lord. And because she was saved, she got on God's team, and helped deliver those spies that went, sent out by Joshua, to spy out the land. Again, what James is saying is, "Talk is cheap." I tell people, if your religion hasn't changed your life, you'd better change your religion. "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature."

Now, those are the two illustrations James uses for examples. But then, he gives a classic illustration, and with the illustration we'll close. And the illustration makes it very clear. Here's the illustration, in verse 26: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." Now, let's visit the mortuary. And there is a body, a cadaver. It is dead. Do you expect that corpse to do any work? Do you expect it to do anything, to get up and walk around the room, to do the dishes, to vacuum the floor, to

preach a sermon, to sing in the choir, to do anything? No. Why? It has no life. And a body without the spirit is dead. Now, let's look at somebody else who has the spirit within them. They are alive. They are not a lifeless body. They have life in them. Now, they can vacuum the floor, they can do the dishes, they can sing in the choir, they can take the offering. They can do all of these things. Why? Because they have life in them. Friend, it is not the works that bring the life; it is the life that brings the works. Just that clear. They do what they do because they are what they are: alive. Now, you can't take a dead body and say, "Get busy, and, therefore, when you get busy, then you'll be okay—when you begin to do something. Show us. Become a living person by doing something." He can't. He's dead—he's dead. Only when he has life can he have works. Now, the works don't produce the life; the life produces the works. "For by grace, through faith, unto good works."

Paul is talking about a know-so salvation; James is talking about a show-so salvation. Now, let's wrap it up right now. I want you to beware of any kind of works righteousness. Don't get the idea that good works can save you. They can't save you anymore than works could give life to a dead body. It's impossible. "For by grace are ye saved, through faith..." "And if by grace, it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace..." Remember Romans 11:6. Don't try to save yourself. You can't do that anymore than Greg could lift himself off the floor, or a drowning man could take hold of his hair and lift himself out of the water. It is by the grace of God.

Conclusion

And it's amazing how we try to put certain qualifications on salvation. And we have these prayer benches here, but I don't put them here for the reason that some people have what they call an altar in the church, that you come to the altar to get saved. And there at the altar somehow you pray through. A man in a country church, who ultimately became a Christian, said, "I went to that old-fashioned church and got down at the altar, trying to find God, trying to do something to get right with God. And one dear brother came and kneeled beside me, and he said, 'Brother, hold on; just hold on.' He said, 'Hold on till you get saved. That's what I did.' And so, he said, I was there praying, trying to hold on. He said, a sister came and kneeled beside me. She said, 'Oh brother, Oh brother, let go. You're never going to be saved till you let go. I had to let go before God saved me.' And then, he said, she got up, and another came to that old-fashioned altar and said, 'Look for the light. Look for a bright light. I saw a bright light when I got saved.'" And this poor man said, "You know, between trying to hold on, let go, and look for that light, I almost didn't make it." Listen. The Bible doesn't say anything about holding on, or letting go, or looking for a light. The Bible says sweetly, simply, sublimely, surely, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you'll be saved." "For by grace are ye

saved through faith.” Don’t try to mix these things. Don’t get the idea that good works—a little or a lot—will save you, or help save you. It’s the grace of God. Now, beware, therefore, of trying to mix works and faith. But also beware of a dead faith. Beware of just simply giving assent to certain facts, professing certain things. That is a Profitless Profession. That is a Barren Belief. And, therefore, it is a Fatal Faith. It has no life. You have no more religion than the devil. People say, “Oh, yes, I’m saved. I know the plan of salvation.” Precious friend, you’re not saved by the plan of salvation; you’re saved by the man of salvation. His name is Jesus. And don’t be like that woman in the hospital who said, “I don’t see how just saying that can do any good.” She’s right. Put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and I promise you, on the authority of the Word of God, He will save you. And, if there’s somebody here tonight, and you’ve had a Profitless Profession, you have had a Barren Belief, and you have a Fatal Faith, I want to ask you to put your trust in the Son of God. Trust Him to save you, and He will save you. And I’ll tell you something else: It will show up in your life—it will.

Let’s pray together. Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. “Father God. I pray that You will seal Your Word to our hearts tonight, and, Lord, teach us—teach us, Lord—to have the kind of faith in You that is transformational, and not mere hollow profession and barren belief. Deliver us, Lord, from dead faith, which is really not faith at all, to a living, vital relationship with Jesus. Lord, I just pray tonight if there’s somebody here in this service who is not truly saved, that tonight they will say an everlasting yes to Jesus Christ, and come to Him in repentance and faith and trust Him. In Your dear name. Amen.”

What the Bible Says About Faith That Saves

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: April 14, 1991

Main Scripture Text: James 2:14–26

*“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he
hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?”*

JAMES 2:14

Outline

Introduction

- I. A Dead Faith Is Profitless
- II. A Dead Faith Is Fruitless
- III. A Dead Faith Is Lifeless
 - A. The Example of Abraham
 - B. The Example of Rahab
 - C. The Illustration Concerning the Body Without Works

Conclusion

Introduction

Take God’s Word; turn with me, please, if you would, to the book of James, chapter 2—James chapter 2. And, in just a moment, we’re going to begin reading in verse 14.

Now, Brother Jim, I want to tell you that the Easter pageant, the Memphis Passion Play, was a great, great blessing. We saw hundreds and hundreds of people come to know the Lord Jesus Christ. And, each night, after this Memphis Passion Play, I would have the opportunity to stand up and explain to the people how to receive Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord, and I would say to them, “If you will just trust Christ, He will save you. You can be saved right now, where you are.” Well, we had a number of people who did just that: they prayed and asked Christ to come into their heart and marked on that card that they had prayed and received Christ. But, I had several to write me notes, and they said, “Mr. Rogers”—or Pastor Rogers, or Reverend Rogers, or whatever they might want to call me. They said—“Why did you not tell people what they really needed to do to be saved?” I had one or two who wrote me and said, “Why didn’t you tell them what the Bible says: that if they want to be saved, they need to be baptized—that no one can be saved without being baptized?” I had another who said,

“Why didn’t you tell them that in order to be saved, not only did they need to be baptized, but they needed to speak in tongues if they wanted to be saved? Why did you just simply give this ‘easy believeism,’ and just tell people if they’ll just trust Christ, they’ll be saved? Why didn’t you tell them what the Bible says?” Well, folks, I thought that’s exactly what I was doing, but I want to make it clear tonight one more time what the Bible says about faith that saves, or saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now look, if you will, in James 2:14. This is where many people go astray because they do not understand what Brother James is saying. James is talking about salvation and works, and James says, *“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?”*—some translations give it this way: *“Can that faith save him?”—“If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be...warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful [for] the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is”—D-E-A-D—“dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble”*—the word here literally means they “shudder.” It’s a word that means “to make the hair stand up on the back of their necks.” It actually comes from a word which means “to stand up.” They just shudder, tremble—*“But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”* (James 2:14–26)

Well, my dear friend, just a cursory reading of this passage makes it look like we’re not saved apart from works. I mean, you look at it, and that’s what it seems to say—so much that Martin Luther, when he first looked at this and studied it carefully, said, “The book of James doesn’t belong in the Bible. It is an epistle of straw,” until he continued to study and see exactly what God has said. Now, lest you think by reading this passage that I’m going to say that you’re saved by works or by grace plus works, I want to tell you, my dear friend—I want to say it with all of the unction, function, emotion, no stutter, no stammer, no equivocation, everything that I can muster: you are saved by grace and grace alone, and faith lays hold of that grace. Now, I want to make that very clear. I want you to get that in your mind.

Just turn, now, back to Romans for a moment, and then we're going to bring Brother Paul and Brother James together and show you what Paul is saying and what James is saying. But, turn with me now, just for a moment, to Romans 4. Now, over here in the second chapter of James, Paul says, "*Was not Abraham our father justified by works...?*" (James 2:21) Now, let's turn to Romans 4 and see what Paul says: "*What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?*"—that is, he's the father of the Jews. That's what it means: "as pertaining to the flesh"—"*For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God*"—Paul said, "Listen, if works justified Abraham, he could strut, but no one can strut before God"—"*For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt*"—if you could work your way to heaven, you couldn't sing "Jesus Paid it All"; you would have to say, "Jesus owes me something" because—"*to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.*" (Romans 4:1–6) Hey, folks, it sounds like we have a problem here, doesn't it? I mean, it sounds like James is saying, "Abraham is justified by works." Paul is saying, "No, he wasn't. He's justified by the grace of God without works of any kind." And so, you have, to some people, a conundrum, a problem, an enigma here. They're trying to get it all straightened out.

By the way, that Martin Luther, whose song we heard this morning ("A Mighty Fortress Is Our God") was in the city of Rome on the Scala Santa, the holy stairs in St. John the Divine Church. And, he was there on his knees with his rosary doing penance a step at a time—those holy stairs. Some think that Jesus ascended those stairs going into Pilate's judgment hall. And so, they have those stairs there, and there's old Martin Luther. He's on his knees climbing up, doing penance, trying to get right with God, trying to be saved by being a good man, praying and begging and pleading and trying by works to be saved. But, all of this time Martin Luther has been doing something: he had been studying the book of Romans. And there, while he was there on his knees, the Spirit of God took the Word of God and put a shaft of gospel sunlight into the heart of that man, Martin Luther, and he heard the scripture that he'd known so long, but he heard it in the innermost part of his being—Romans 1:17: "*The just shall live by faith.*" (Romans 1:17) And, he saw it clearly and plainly—what you and I know, what our children in Sunday school know: that it's "*not by works of righteousness [that] we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.*" (Titus 3:5) You see, dear friend, we are saved by the grace of God and by nothing else—nothing else.

You say, "But what about James?" I'm going to get to James in just a moment, but I

don't want you to be confused. I want you to know, before we ever go to this passage that James gave us, that salvation is by the grace of God and not of works of any kind. One of my favorite verses is Romans 11:6. I want you to look at it. You see, some people will say, "Well, maybe it's grace and works. Maybe we just take the two and we mix them together." Oh, no. The Bible says in Romans 11:6: *"And if by grace...it [is] no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace."* (Romans 11:6) The minute you add any works to grace, grace is no longer grace. And, anybody who tries to be saved part by grace and part by works is a disgrace to grace. *"If by grace...it [is] no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. [And] if [by] works...it is no more [of] grace: otherwise work is no more work."* (Romans 11:6) What's he saying? He's just simply saying you cannot—you cannot, you cannot—put together grace and works. You just can't do it.

Now, there is, so far, the classic program. Now, the problem—what you have. I want you to imagine what Brother James is talking about. Now, let's just go back to James now. I've tried to lay a foundation so we can understand James a little better. Now, just go back to James chapter 2. That's really our text. We just took a little side trip over there to see what Brother Paul would say. Now, we're back to James again—okay?—James, the second chapter.

Now, James imagines two men. They're having an argument. They're having sort of a religious argument. Now, both of them are claiming that they're saved. And, one man says, "Well, I'm a child of God. I'm a believer," and the other man says, "Now, wait a minute; wait a minute. You say that you're a believer. You say that you're trusting the Lord." He says, "You show me your faith without your works." He says, "I'll show you my faith by my works." (James 2:18) What's he saying? Look in verse 18: *"Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works."* (James 2:18) Now, listen carefully and listen up because if you don't, you're going to get sucked into some false cult or something like that.

By the way, dear friend, did you know that grace is exclusively Christian—exclusively Christian? Jesus Christ has cornered the market on grace. Nobody else, except our Lord, teaches salvation by grace. There are only two kinds of religion in the world: grace and works, one spelled "do," the other spelled "done." I mean, dear friend, when Jesus died, He bowed His head on the cross and He said, *"It is finished"* (John 19:30)—"Tetalesti." That means "it is paid in full."

So, here are these two men in an argument. And, verse 18 is the key to the whole thing. One man says, "You show me your faith without your works. I will show you my faith by my works." (James 2:18) Now, what are we talking about here? Well, we're talking about showing our faith by our works. Now, what these men are saying, really—one man says, "Well, I'm just saved by trusting the Lord." The other man says, "Oh, faith

without works is dead.” There’s no real contradiction here; they’re heads and tails of the same coin. Now, what Paul was talking about in Romans 4 is justification before God. What James is talking about is justification before men. Now, we’re justified in the sight of God, and God knows when I am justified when I trust Christ. He knows that, but you can’t see that. I mean, you can’t see that I have trusted Christ; all you can see is what I do, what I say, how I live. Isn’t that right? That’s all you can see. You can’t see my faith. Anybody here can see my faith? If you say you can, you’re lying. You can’t see it, but you can see my works, right? So, if I say that I have faith and you don’t see my works, I can’t be justified in your sight.

Now remember, Paul is talking about being justified before God. James is talking about being justified before men. Paul is talking about the root of our salvation. James is talking about the fruit of our salvation. The root is beneath the ground. The fruit is hanging out on the tree, but the fruit is the proof of the root. Paul is talking about inward justification. James is talking about outward demonstration. Paul is talking about the provision of salvation. James is talking about the proof of salvation. Paul is talking about the means of salvation. James is talking about the marks of salvation. Paul is talking about a know-so salvation. James is talking about a show-so salvation. Now, they’re not the same. They’re very close, but they’re different. Now, if you’ll just remember this, you’ll get it straight, I really believe: *you are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.* Got it? *You’re saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone. You’re not saved by faith and works, but you’re saved by faith that works.* Have you got it?

Now, you may say, “Well, pastor, you’re slicing it thin.” No, I’m not. I am going to show you tonight from this passage of Scripture what James is saying. James is saying, “Don’t just go around here saying that you believe in God—that you believe in salvation by grace through faith—if there has not been a radical, dramatic change in your life.” *If your religion hasn’t changed your life, you better change your religion.* You do not have the New Testament kind. But, my dear friend, you do what you do not in order to be saved but because, indeed, you have been saved.

Now, James is talking here about a dead faith, and I want us to do an autopsy on this dead faith, okay? Let’s just take it apart and look at this dead faith and see why it is a dead faith.

I. A Dead Faith Is Profitless

First of all, I want you to notice, beginning in verse 14, that a dead faith is profitless and it brings a profitless profession. Notice here: “*What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?*” (James 2:14) Now remember, it says, literally, “Can that faith save him—that kind of faith? Can that kind of

faith save him?” Notice what James is saying: “though a man say”—in other words, James doesn’t say the man has real faith; he just says that he does. You see, everything that people say is not necessarily so. Just saying it doesn’t make it so. I mean, you say, “Oh, I’m trusting the Lord.” Well, it’s one thing for you to say it, but are you really trusting the Lord? Just to say that you are doesn’t mean that you are.

I was visiting in a hospital some time back, and I was praying with a person who was sick. And, my wife tells me, “Adrian, you cannot whisper so be careful in public places. They hear you a block away when you whisper.” And so, I was just praying with this woman in a hospital, or an individual—I think it was a woman. And, when I finished and I started to leave, I heard somebody across the hallway say, “Come see me, too.” I thought they were calling for a nurse, and I started to leave. And, they said, “Please come see me,” and I wasn’t sure whether I was the one they wanted or not. And, I came back, and I looked in the room; and I said, “Were you talking to me?” She said, “Yes.” She said, “I heard you praying. Are you a minister?” I said, “Yes, I am.” She said, “Would you please come in here and pray for me?” She said, “I’m afraid. I’m about to die, and I don’t know God. I need to know God. I need to be saved.” And, this woman—I looked at her; I could see that death was written on her. I’ve been in the hospital enough to know, pretty much. And, her face was white, and her eyes were sunken back; and her hair was spread out there on the pillow. And, she had a tortured look on her because not only was she being tortured physically; she had no peace, no rest of soul.

She said, “Would you please pray for me?” I said, “Yes, ma’am, I will.” She said, “Can you tell me how to be saved—how to go to heaven?” I said, “Yes, ma’am, I can,” and I explained to her how Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay her sin debt. And, I said to her, “Ma’am, if you will trust Christ—just trust Him—He’ll save you.” And, I said, “I’m going to pray for you; and then, I want to lead you in a prayer,” and I prayed for her. And then, I said, “Now, I want you to pray after me: Dear God.” She said, “Dear God.” “I know that you love me.” “I know that you love me.” “I know that you want to save me.” “I know that you want to save me.” “You died to save me.” “You died to save me.” “You promised to save me.” “You promised to save me.” “If I would only trust you.” “If I would only trust you.” “I do trust you.” “I do trust you,” she said, “right now, this moment, with all of my heart. Come into my heart. Forgive my sin, and save me,” she prayed. And then, I looked at her, and she had still that look of agony on her face. Her brow was pinched. There was that fear that was still there. And, she looked at me, and she said, “Reverend, I don’t see how just saying that can do any good,” and I said, “Ma’am, you’re one hundred percent correct. Just saying that can’t do any good whatsoever. But,” I said, “if you’ll trust Jesus, He’ll save you.” She said, “Explain it again.” I explained it again. I said, “Now, let’s pray again. Dear God.” She said, “Dear God...” And, I got to that part, “I trust you to save me”—she said, “I trust you to save me.” And, when I

looked again, there was the light, the glory, of heaven on her face. I said, “Did He save you?” She said, “I believe He really saved me.”

And, that’s what James is talking about. James is saying in verse 14: *“though a man say he hath faith...can [that] faith save him?”* (James 2:14) Just saying that can’t do any good at all. Just repeating pious phrases never saved anybody, but trusting Jesus is what saves you. Now, James here is just talking about the man who has a glib—a religious—vocabulary, but he has never had a divine encounter with Almighty God. And, what James says about this dead religion is that it is profitless—it is profitless. Pious platitudes don’t get you to heaven.

II. A Dead Faith Is Fruitless

The second thing he says about it—not only is it profitless; it is fruitless. It is a barren belief. Notice, if you will, in verses 17 and 18: he says, *“[And] even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew [you] my faith by my works.”*

(James 2:17–18) Verse 15 is what I really wanted: *“If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding [you] give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?”*—it doesn’t do any good—*“Even so”*—verse 17—*“faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone”*—you see, because it is profitless, it is fruitless; it is barren. Now, verse 18—*“Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest...there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.”* (James 2:15–19)

Now, some people, dear friend, don’t have any more faith than the devil himself. And, I’m going to tell you something else: the devil is more orthodox than some preachers—he really is. He has more religion than some preachers; I mean, he believes more than some preachers. The devil has a certain intellectual belief concerning the gospel. Now, just keep your finger there in James, and look with me, if you will, in Matthew chapter 8 here, for a moment. Let’s see what the faith of the devil really is. Let’s just see what the devil’s belief is, because your belief and the devil’s belief may be very much alike. Look here, if you will, in Matthew 8, and let’s begin in verse 28; it speaks of Jesus: *“And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils”—*that is, demons—*“coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce...that no man might pass by that way. And, behold, they cried out”—*now, these demons in this man...listen to what it says—*“behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God?”* (Matthew 8:28–29) That’s orthodox. My dear friend, that’s exactly who Jesus Christ is: *“thou Son of*

God.” (Matthew 8:29)

Now, just turn to the book of Mark here, and look with me in Mark chapter 1 here for a moment. I’m just talking to you right now about the belief of the devil; the devil believes. Mark chapter 1—look with me in verse 23, if you will: *“And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.”* (Mark 1:23–24) That’s exactly who is He is: He is *“the Holy One of God.”* (Mark 1:24)

Not only Matthew, Mark, but just turn to Luke now, and see what Luke says that the devil says about our Lord. Luke 4:41: Jesus now is casting out demons, and the Bible says, *“And [demons]”—that is, devils—“also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God.”* (Luke 4:41) That’s pretty orthodox, isn’t it? That’s exactly what James is saying over here: *“the devils...believe, and [shudder].”* (James 2:19)

But now, dear friend, let me tell you about the faith that saves. Real faith doesn’t cause people to shudder; it does just the opposite—it brings peace. *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (Romans 5:1) Suppose, when I give the invitation tonight, let’s suppose the devil is sitting out there in human flesh—let’s hope he’s not. And, he’s not, but let’s just say suppose he were—and the devil were to come down this aisle and meet one of our ministers, and he were to say, “I want to place my membership in Bellevue Baptist Church,” and that minister would say, “Well now, Mr. Devil, before you join Bellevue Baptist Church, we want to talk to you a little bit. We want to see if you’re theologically correct. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?” “Yes, I do.” “Do you believe He was born of a virgin?” “Absolutely.” “Do you believe He died on the cross a vicarious death?” “Oh, yes, I believe that.” “Do you believe that He was raised from the dead?” “Oh, yes.” “Well, Mr. Devil, if we receive you into our church, will you work?” “Oh, yes, I’ll be glad to join the choir. As a matter of fact, if you’ll ordain me, I’ll serve as a deacon. And, as a matter of fact, if you’ll let me, I’ll be glad to preach.” The devil himself is *“transformed as [a minister] of righteousness.”* (2 Corinthians 11:15) Well, this man sounds like he is a great candidate for church membership. “But, just more question, Mr. Devil, before we put our stamp of approval upon you: Will you submit to Jesus Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords?” “No, I will not.” And, he has not, and he never will.

And, my dear friend, I want to tell you that are in this congregation tonight and some of you who are listening to me on radio, you think that you’re going to heaven because you are orthodox, because you believe the facts of the faith and you know the plan of salvation. I want to tell you, *you’re not saved by the plan of salvation; you’re saved by the man of salvation, and His name is Jesus.* And, you can believe all that stuff. *“The*

devils...believe, and [tremble].” (James 2:19) What’s wrong with a dead faith? My dear friend, it is profitless. It is fruitless. You may have an intellectual understanding of the gospel, but you’re going to miss heaven by eighteen inches because it’s never gotten from here down to here, where you have trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior.

III. A Dead Faith Is Lifeless

Now listen, we’re talking about a show-so salvation. Now, this faith is dead not only because it is a profitless profession and a barren belief, but not only is it profitless and fruitless; it is lifeless. Look, if you will, in verse 20. Now, here’s James continuing to talk: *“But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?”*—it is profitless; it is fruitless, and it is lifeless. *“Faith without works is dead”* (James 2:20)—*“Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not be faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”* (James 2:20–26)

Now, what is James saying? Look at it. He’s saying the reason that that kind of faith doesn’t save is because it’s not true faith; it’s dead faith. A man with that kind of faith is still dead in trespasses and sin. See, a Christian is somebody who has the life of God. Now, listen to me again: *we’re saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone. It is not plus works but faith that works.* Now, James is not saying that works saves; what James is saying is that real faith produces works—real faith produces works. Even our English word *believe* comes from an old English—“by-live.” What a man really believes he lives by. The rest is just talk—just talk.

I had the privilege of talking with President George Bush about his salvation. We sat down and talked about it. And, I was with our friend, James Kennedy, who founded Evangelism Explosion. We were sitting in his library, talking. He said, “If you were to ask me what I’m trusting to get me to heaven, I would tell you that I believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for my sins and I have trusted Him as my personal Savior and Lord.” And, I said to myself, “Boy, that sounds wonderful.” But then, he said, “I would also say that I have endeavored to live by the Ten Commandments and to obey the Golden Rule.” James Kennedy, who knows what I know tonight, said, “Mr. Vice President”—he was Vice President then—“in all due respect, sir, you’re not saved by good works of any kind—the Ten Commandments, or the Golden Rule, or anything like that. You’re saved by trusting Christ and that alone.” Our President said, “I don’t believe that. I don’t agree

with that.” He said, “Are you trying to tell me that a man can simply say he believes in God and live any way he wants and go to heaven? I don’t believe that.” He said, “My mother never used the term ‘born again,’ but she loved God. She was a woman of prayer and faith and spent her life for other people.” He said, “If she’s not in heaven, nobody is.” Boy, I liked what he was saying because I like the idea that he believed that when a man believes in Jesus Christ, it ought to change his life. I like that, and I liked the fact that he said he was trusting Christ as his personal Savior. Jim Kennedy said, “Mr. Vice President, I wasn’t saying those things are not important; I was just saying you don’t do those things in order to be saved.” He said, “Well, if you put that way, I’ll agree.” Don’t you like that?

That’s exactly the classic thing. That’s the classic thing that James is talking about right here. James is just saying, “Don’t come around here telling me you believe in Jesus Christ if it doesn’t change your life, the way that you live.” Now friend, what’s the Bible saying? There’s no real contradiction. *You’re saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.* And, Paul is talking about a know-so salvation. James is talking about a show-so salvation.

Now, James gives two examples and one illustration. And, I want you to look at them, and after that, we’ll be finished. James talks about what he wants to show, and I’m so glad he gave these two examples and one illustration. The one example is Abraham. The other example is Rahab. And then, the last is a body without works. All right, now look at it.

A. **The Example of Abraham**

First of all, he says... Here’s the illustration concerning Abraham: *“And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.”* (James 2:23–24) Now, wait a minute. How did Abraham show his faith? Well, look in verse 21: *“Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?”* (James 2:21) Now, this is very important right now, or else you’re going to have a contradiction between James and Paul. James says that Abraham was justified when he offered Isaac. Do you see it? Look at it—verse 21: *“Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?”* (James 2:21)

Well, when did Abraham really believe God? And, when was it accounted to him for righteousness? When he offered Isaac? No—no. Go back, if you will, to Genesis 15 with me for just a moment. Now folks, this is important. It’s worth turning to. Just lick your fingers, and turn to Genesis 15—Genesis 15—and look with me in verse 6. God appears to Abraham in Genesis 15. God speaks to Abraham, and God gives Abraham a promise. And look, if you will, in verse 6: *“And he believed in the Lord; and he”*—that is,

the Lord—“*counted it to him*”—that is, to Abraham—“*for righteousness.*” (Genesis 15:6) All right, thirty years later plus, he offered Isaac up, and James says that’s when he was justified. But, Genesis says he was justified back over here thirty-plus years before, when he just believed God and it was “*counted...to him for righteousness.*” (Genesis 15:6) You see, my dear friend, all James is showing is this: that when he offered up Isaac three decades later, he was showing what happened way back yonder. That’s all he’s saying. You see, James is talking about being justified before men. None of us could see the faith in Abraham’s heart back here when Abraham believed God in Genesis 15. But brother, I’ll guarantee you, I can see the faith in Abraham when he offered up Isaac. Can’t you? See, James is saying, “Show me your faith. Show me your faith. Show me your faith. Don’t tell me that you believe in God and it doesn’t affect your life.” That’s what he’s saying. You see, Abraham was saved when he first trusted the Lord, but his faith was demonstrated when he offered up Isaac. He’s not saved by faith plus works, but he was saved by faith that works.

B. The Example of Rahab

And then, the next illustration is Rahab in verse 25. (James 2:25) Rahab was a harlot, and she became a saint—from the shady lady of Jericho to a woman in the lineage of our Savior. Her life was changed. You say, “Well, I’m not that bad.” I’ll tell you what: salvation will make a bad man good and a good man better. And friend, you’ll be changed. “*If any man [is] in Christ, he is a new creature.*” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

C. The Illustration Concerning the Body Without Works

And then, last of all, he gives two illustrations: one is Abraham; the other is Rahab—or, two examples. And then, he gives an illustration. Now, here is the illustration. Look, if you will—and this makes it completely clear, and you’ll see it right now. Just go back to James 2 with me for just a moment and look in the last verse, in verse 26 here. And, this just kind of wraps it all up: “*For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*” (James 2:26)

Now, listen very carefully: What good is a body of truth without the life of the Spirit? You say, “I believe this. I believe this. I believe this.” You take all of your beliefs, and you put them together, and you’ve got a body of truth. But, if there’s no life in that body of truth, it can’t move. The body without the spirit is dead. Now, the body in this illustration is your belief. But, if that’s all you have, and you don’t have the Spirit of God in you, then you have no life. What good is a corpse without a spirit? What good is belief without life? Now, if I had a corpse out here—I mean, a cadaver; I mean, a dead person right here—what would make that person get up and do good works? Wouldn’t he have to have life first? He’d have to have life. Now, I could fling his arms around and stand him up and make him walk. What good is that? I’m just manipulating a dead corpse.

That's redundant, I know. But, a corpse, a dead person—I'm just manipulating him. What is necessary for that person to do good works? What? Life, right? Life. Before he can work, he's got to have life.

Now, listen to me, and never forget it: if he received life and began to walk around up here because he received life, would his walking around give him life? No, he walks around because he has received life, see. Is that clear? Nod your head. Look intelligent. Listen—listen: the works don't make him alive. He can't do the works until he gets alive. Once he has life, then he has works. And, you'd ask him, "Why are you alive?" He says, "I'm alive because I'm walking." I say, "No, mister, you're walking because you're alive." That's it! *"The body without the spirit is dead."* (James 2:26)

Conclusion

Now, what does all of that mean? Number one thing: It means you can just trust Jesus like a little child and you'll be as saved tonight as you'll ever be just by saying the eternal "yes" to Jesus. And, somebody can call it "easy believeism." They can call it anything they want. But, my dear friend, there's only one way to be saved, and that is trusting Jesus and Jesus alone. *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."* (Ephesians 2:8–9) But, I'll tell you one thing, mister: don't you come around here telling me you're saved if the life of God is not in you. And, you walk the walk and you talk the talk because you have received the gift, which is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Thank God for it. And folks, I just tell you, that's just a wonderful salvation. I bless God for it. So, I hope you have a know-so and a show-so salvation.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. I wonder how many tonight could say, "Brother Rogers, I'm saved. I know I'm saved by the grace of God. But, not only do I know I'm saved because I say I'm saved, but because my works are making my faith known. I have had a changed life. I have had an encounter with the Lord Jesus. I'm not all I ought to be. I'm not all I'm going to be. But, thank God, I have received a life because I trusted Christ. And, by the grace of God, I am what I am. And, I'll just give you this testimony in gratefulness tonight that I know I'm saved." Would you just lift up your hand and hold it up? Praise the Lord. Take it down.

Now, if you couldn't lift your hand right now, I want to pray for you and I want to help you tonight to trust Christ, to say an eternal "yes" to Him, to believe on Him. The Bible says, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."* (Acts 16:31) You say, "Where does repentance come in?" Repentance and faith are heads and tails of the same coin. You turn from sin to Jesus. You turn to Jesus from sin. You just trust the Lord—trust the Lord. Would you pray like this if you're not certain that you're saved? "Dear God"—and just like that lady in that hospital, I want you to pray, but I want you to

mean it—“Dear God, I know that you love me. Jesus, you died to save me. You promised to save me if I would trust you. I do trust you right now, this moment. I trust you—I trust you, Lord, like a little child. Come into my heart. Forgive my sin. Save me, Jesus.” Would you ask Him? “Save me, Jesus. Save me.”

The Autopsy of a Dead Faith

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: July 23, 1978

Main Scripture Text: James 2:17–26

“Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.”

JAMES 2:17

Outline

Introduction

- I. A Dead Faith has no Compassion
- II. A Dead Faith has no Communion
- III. A Dead Faith has not Real Conversion

Conclusion

Introduction

Turn to James chapter 2, for a moment, as we continue through the book of James. I know you're enjoying James, but I know that some of us are a little bruised and bleeding after James has finished with us. You can just be grateful that you have me and not James for a pastor.

I want to speak tonight on this subject, “The Autopsy of a Dead Faith,” the autopsy of a dead faith. James chapter 2 and verse 17: *“Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone”* (James 2:17). Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

Let us pray, one more time. Father we are keenly aware tonight that if anything real and lasting and holy is done, it will be the work of the Holy Spirit. And, Father, tonight we are also keenly aware that Satan does not want that work done. So, in the name of Jesus, we yield to the Spirit, and stand against the evil one. And, Father I pray that you would anoint me, and give me strength to preach. Heavenly Father I pray that Thou shalt speak to those that hear, anoint their ears. And, Lord help us to receive Your word, not to be hearers only, but to be doers. For we pray in the name of Jesus and for His sake. Amen.

Now, at the very outset of this message, before I say anything else, I want to make it abundantly clear that a man is saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and by nothing else. It is grace plus nothing. You are not saved by doing good works, and if you feel that you are saved by doing good works, if you feel that good works ever helped save you, you can never, ever have the assurance of your salvation. If

somebody asks you, “Are you saved?” The very best you can say is, “Well, I hope I’m saved.” If you believe that works—have anything whatever to do with your salvation, because you’ll have to start adding up.

Now, if you were to ask me, “Adrian Rogers, are you saved?” I’d say, “Yes, praise God! I know I am saved.” And, you’d say, “Well, you have a lot of confidence in yourself.” Well, if you knew me like I know me, you’d know that I don’t have any confidence in me, but I’ve got a wonderful confidence in my Savior, and I’m trusting the Lord Jesus Christ, and I’m trusting The Word of God that says, “...*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...*” (Acts 16:31).

But, if works had anything to do with my salvation, and you were to ask me, “Adrian Rogers, are you saved? Do you know you’re saved?” I’d have to say, “Well, now, let me think. Yes, I believe I’m saved. I prayed today, and I studied the Bible today, and I preached today, and I witnessed today, and I didn’t curse today, and I didn’t steal today, and I didn’t lie today. Hmm, but, I did lose my temper today. Well, let me see, I hope I’m saved.” Do you see what I’m talking about? Do you see what I’m talking about? You say, “How’d you lose your temper?” I didn’t, that’s just an illustration. I did something else, I did something else; I won’t tell you what I did.

Okay, now what I’m trying to say is this, that if you depend upon works, a little or a lot, to get you to Heaven, then you’ll never be able to say, “Praise God, I know that I’m saved.” You are saved by grace through faith.

Martin Luther, one day was in the time of the Dark Ages, was trying to earn his way to Heaven—trying to be saved by good works—and he was climbing the holy stairs, climbing those stair steps on his knees, saying so many prayers on each step hoping to work his way to Heaven, a young, brilliant Roman Catholic theologian. And, then God spoke to him like a bolt out of Heaven. And, God gave him a marvelous verse in Romans chapter 1 and verse 17: “...*The just shall live by faith*” (Romans 1:17). And, Martin Luther saw it, once and for all, it was simply glorious, it was gloriously simple. That he was not saved by laws, and rules, and rituals, and ceremonies, and sacraments, he was saved. The Bible said, sweetly, plainly, sublimely, “...*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...*” (Acts 16:31). He wrote his ninety-five—ninety-five theses—and nailed them to the church door, and the protestant reformation was on. One of the greatest revivals the world has ever known was born out of this truth, that a man is saved by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, having said that, I want us to look at what James says, because it seems as though on the surface that James contradicts this truth. It seems as almost as though James and Paul are having an argument. And, if you read the Bible, on the surface it will seem like there is a grave and a great contradiction. Just keep one marker there in James the second chapter, and then turn please for a moment to Romans chapter 3,

and I want to show you what would seem to be contradiction in The Word of God. Romans chapter 3. Well, let's just go to chapter 4 and verse 2, and I think it'll be clearer even there—*“For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God”*—and then verses 5 and 6—*“But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness”* (Romans 4:2,5).

Now, Paul says clearly and succinctly that we're not saved by works. If Abraham were saved, justified by works, then he would have something to boast of, but not before God, and Paul makes it very clear that Abraham was not saved by works. But, then notice what James says in James chapter 3, verse 21: *“Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?”* (James 2:21). Then look in verse 24: *“Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only”* (James 3:24).

Now, that looks like a real apparent contradiction in The Word of God. Paul says it's by grace through faith, Paul says that we're justified by faith, and not by works, and James says we're justified by works as well as by faith, and that faith without works is dead.

Now, there is no real contradiction, if you understand what both James and Paul are saying. They're both saying the same thing, but they're saying it a different way. James and Paul are giving the heads and the tails of the same truth. But, here is the key to understanding the apparent contradiction. Paul is speaking about justification before God, and James is speaking about justification before men. And, if you don't understand that, there will be a great contradiction.

You see, God can see our hearts. God can see our faith. But, look at me. Do you see any faith? You can't see any faith. Look at me, do you see any love? You can't see any love. You can't see anything but me. You can't see what's in me. You can't see what's in my heart. The only way you know anything about my faith is what you see me do, and what you hear me say, right? You can't see my heart, but God can see my heart. Therefore, I am justified before God by faith. But, I'm justified before you by works.

Notice, go back to the book of James again and you'll see it a little more clearly now. James is talking about a show-me faith. James wants to get faith out of the academics and down into the arena. Look in chapter 2 and verse 14: *“What doth it profit my brother, though a man say he hath faith”*—just put a circle around that word *say*, a man says he has faith. He doesn't necessarily have it. He just simply says he has faith—*“and hath not works”*—can faith save him? And, literally the scripture says in the manuscripts, *“can that faith save him?”* (James 2:14). Can that kind of faith save him? The faith where a man says that he has it, but he doesn't have any works to prove that he has it. And, then look in verse 18: *“Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works”*—

notice what James is saying now. Show me thy faith—*“shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works”* (James 2:18).

And, so James is talking about a show-me kind of faith. James is not talking about being justified before God, but James is talking about being justified before men. And, so man cannot see our faith apart from our works. Paul is talking about the root of our justification. James is talking about the fruit of our justification. The root is beneath ground, you can't see it. The fruit is above ground, and if the root is there, the fruit will show. Paul is talking about inward justification. James is talking about outward justification. Paul is talking about the provision of our justification. James is talking about the proof of our justification. Paul is talking about the means of our justification. James is talking about the marks of our justification. Paul is talking about a know-so salvation. James is talking about a show-so salvation. There's no real contradiction at all.

But, what James is saying is this, and I want you to understand it very clearly. James knows, as Paul knows, that man is saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone. Now, understand that. Man is saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone. And, James being the practical critter that he is, makes it very plain that people who just simply have a say-so salvation, without a show-so salvation, are really not going to Heaven. It's not that works save, it is not that works even help save. A man is justified before God by faith alone. But, that faith is proven before men, and he's justified before men by his works. And, so I want us to notice the autopsy of a dead faith.

Now, notice, not all faith is valid faith. Some faith is bogus faith. Some faith is pseudo faith. That is not real faith at all. Just like some gospel preaching is not gospel preaching, because it's not truly the gospel. And, Paul said, *“If any man preach any other gospel unto you that I have preached unto you, let him be accursed”* (Galatians 1:9). But, he says, *“There is another gospel, which is not another”* (Galatians 1:6–7). He's not doing doubletalk, he's just simply saying some men call it the gospel, but it's not really the gospel. What some men call faith is not really faith. And, that's what James is saying. Look again in verse 14: *“What doth it profit my brethren though a man say he has faith and hath not works can that kind of faith save him?”* (James 2:14).

I. A Dead Faith Has No Compassion

Now, James is not saying that faith cannot save. But, he's saying faith that does not produce a changed life is dead—dead, dead. And, so let us look now at the autopsy of a dead faith. I want you to notice the three marks that James gives of a dead faith. Number one, it has no compassion.

Continue to read here in verse 15: *“If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled;*

notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works” (James 2:15–18).

Now, let’s just suppose that, that brother Whitmire goes bankrupt leading music. Reckon that’s ever a possibility? And, so he comes to my home one day, poor ol’ fellow, he’s dressed in rags and it’s a cold wintry day, and he’s shivering, and he’s all cold, and he’s all skinny and hungry, and he knocks at my door. And, and I say, “Go away, go away.” “No,” he says, “please, pastor, please. Don’t you remember me? It’s good ol’ Jim. Remember the wonderful times we used to have a Bellevue. Oh, pastor, I’m so cold, and I’m so hungry.”

Now, let’s suppose inside my house I’ve got a lot of nice clothes, and coats, and a pantry full of food, and there’s poor ol’ Jim out there on the steps just shivering. And, I say, “Oh, Jim, bless your little ol’ heart, bless you Jimmy. Oh, Jim, God bless you, go away now. Be full, be warm, Jim.” I don’t give him anything to eat. I don’t give him anything to wear. All it is pious palaver. What good is that going to do Jim Whitmire, or you, or anybody else?

That’s what James is saying. James is saying pious platitudes can’t get you to Heaven. Mere words—mere saying that you believe, the mere reciting of creeds and shibboleths, and those sorts of things—are never going to save your soul. Real faith gives you a love for other people. It’s going to change the way you act to other people. It’s going to give you a compassion, and the repeating of words cannot warm and fill a hungry person, and the repeating of words cannot save and transform a life.

There are so many people who claim to be Baptists who have never been saved—and these people claim to be Orthodox—but there has never been a change in their lives. It’s merely words.

Out West they tell the story of a train that was stopped by an outlaw. He was going with a mask over his face—two guns—through every car, taking the jewelry, taking the billfolds, taking everything of value. Finally, as he got to one of those cars there was a man just trembling all over. He looked at that bandit and said, “Oh, please sir, please, don’t take my billfold. I’m just a poor Baptist preacher.” And, when the outlaw heard that, he said, “Are you a Baptist? So am I. Shake.”

II. A Dead Faith Has No Communion

Now, I think there are a lot of folks who are just like that. They talk a good religion, but they never really have had a change in their lives, and James has a message for them, very clear and very plain. And, so James uses the first point, and he says in his autopsy of a dead faith that, “It is dead because it has no compassion.” And, then secondly, it is

dead because it has no communion.

Look in verse 19 of this same chapter: *“Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?”* (James 2:19–20). Again, it’s dead. This time not because it has no compassion, but this time because it has no communion.

You see, some people have no more faith than the devil. Did you know that in a way the devil is very orthodox? Did you know that the devil is more orthodox than some preachers I know? Did you know that he—the devil—is a real believer in many ways. The Bible says here: *“the devil believes.”* As a matter of fact, he believes so much that it causes him to tremble. Did you know that the devil believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? Turn to Matthew 8, and look in verse 29 for a moment. You’d be surprised just how much the devil believes. This is speaking of the demons, and actually, James says the devil is referring to demons: *“And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God?”* (Matthew 8:29).

I heard the other day of one of our so-called erstwhile Baptist professors over here in Virginia, at a Baptist School that’s paid for by Baptist money, who got up and denied that Jesus was even the Son of God. There was a two-legged rascal who didn’t even have as much faith as a demon in Hell. Even the demons in Hell believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

All right, look in Mark chapter 1 and verse 24. You’re going to find out that the demons believe that Jesus is holy. Here again, the demons are speaking: *“Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God”* (Mark 1:24). Yes, not only do the demons believe He is the Son of God, they believe He is the holy, pure, sinless, Son of God.

But, let’s go on and see what else the demons believe. Look in Luke chapter 4 and verse 41 again. You’re going to find out that they believe that He is the Christ of God, the Messiah of God, the one sent by God into the world to redeem the world. Luke chapter 4 and verse 41: *“And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he rebuking them suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ”* (Luke 4:41).

Now, those are enough scriptures just to show you what I am talking about, and what James means when he says, *“The devils believe and tremble.”* The devil is very, very Orthodox in many ways but, you see, there’s a difference. Look at that phrase, *“the devils believe and tremble.”* Do you know what the word *tremble* means? The literal meaning of the word is to “stand up straight.” It’s translated in some Bibles *shutter*. It has to do with a person being so frightened that their skin crawls, and the hair stands up on the back of their neck. That’s really what it’s talking about.

The demons in Hell cringe, they shutter, they quake in fear at the idea of God. They believe, but their belief has never brought peace to their souls, only torment. They have no longing for Jesus. They have no love for Jesus. Do you know anyone like that? I know a lot of people. When they think of God, all they have is sort of a fearful cringing relationship to God. But, the Bible says, “...*perfect love casteth out fear...*” (1 John 4:18). The Bible says, in Romans chapter 5 and verse 1: “*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Romans 5:1). A dead faith has no communion with God. Oh, it may believe facts about God. You may be very Orthodox. You may pass a theological examination and go straight to Hell. Suppose the devil were to want to join Bellevue Baptist Church—and incidentally, the devil is not fighting churches today, he’s joining them—and he’s working from the inside, not from the outside. Suppose the devil decided he wanted to join Bellevue Baptist Church, and so we’re going to give him a little examination before he joins.

And I say, “Now, Mr. Devil, do you want to be a member of this church?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Well, Mr. Devil, I want to ask you a question. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?”

“Oh, yes, I believe that.”

“Well, now, wait a minute, let’s check you out. Do you believe that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin?”

“Oh, yes, I was there. I witnessed his virgin birth.”

“Well, now, Mr. Devil, do you believe that Jesus Christ died upon the cross?”

“Oh, yes, I know he died upon the cross, I saw him.”

“Well, devil, do you believe that He was raised from the dead?”

“Certainly, I believe that Jesus was raised from the dead.”

“Well, devil, do you believe that Jesus Christ is coming again?”

“Oh, yes, I definitely know that Jesus Christ is coming again.”

“Well, Mr. Devil, if we accept you into this church, are you willing to be baptized by emersion?”

“Oh, well, sure, I know that’s the Bible way of baptism. I saw Jesus when He was baptized by emersion. I was waiting there to tempt Him right after He was baptized. I know in baptism by emersion.”

“Well, Mr. Devil, if we receive you into Bellevue, will you faithfully attend?”

“Well, I can tell you this much, I’ll attend a lot more faithfully than some of your members now attend.”

As a matter of fact, I am sure whether you come or not, he attends every service. And, that’s the reason we bind the devil in the name of Jesus in these services around here. And, if he doesn’t come personally, he certainly sends an emissary or an imp from

the pit.

“Well, thank you Mr. Devil.”

“As a matter of fact,” he says, “If you’d like me to, I’ll join the choir and do a lot of work there. I’ll even serve as a deacon. I think I’ve met some of them in other churches.

As a matter of fact,” he says, “I’ll be most happy to fill the pulpit.”

Did you know that the Bible says that Satan is transformed as an angel of light, and he has ministers, and after hearing that profession of his faith, we’d get ready to vote and welcome him into our fellowship.

“But,” I said, “Now, wait a minute, Mr. Devil, let me just ask you more one question. Are you willing to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord? Are you willing to bow the knee to Jesus Christ, are you willing to submit to Jesus Christ? Are you willing to believe in Him, to love Him, to trust Him, to serve Him?”

Satan with venom spewing from between his teeth would say, “No, I’ll never bow the knee to Jesus Christ. I hate Jesus. No communion, no communion.”

You can be very Orthodox and believe a lot of things, but oh I want to ask you, do you love Jesus Christ? Do you know Jesus Christ? Can you say, “I am His and He is mine, forever, and forever.” And, does God’s Spirit bear witness with your spirit that you’re a child of God? Ah, some of you believe, but you’re lost. You’ve never really been saved. The Bible says, in John the second chapter that, *“many believed on Jesus when they saw the miracles that He did, but Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, for He knew man and needed not that any should testify what was in man”* (John 2:23–25). Jesus knew that these were mere surface believers, these were miracle mongers, but they didn’t really believe with their heart. Did you know that some of you are going to die and go to Hell because you missed salvation by 18 inches. You have it here, but you hadn’t got it here. You know, but you have no more faith than the devil himself.

III. A Dead Faith Has No Real Conversion

Now, the third mark of a dead faith. Not only is there no compassion where a man doesn’t really have a love for his fellow man, not only is there no communion, he doesn’t really have a love for the Lord Jesus Christ, there’s also no real conversion. There’s no basic change. Look please now, beginning in verse 20. James says again, *“But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?”*—or faith was matured—*“And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God”*—friend of God—*“Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the*

messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:20–26).

Now, James is saying that faith that does not change a life, and does not root in action, is dead. You see, an unconverted man is dead in trespasses and sins. A converted man is one who has life. Now, if you see a person who says he believes in Jesus Christ, and he’s been saved and born again, and yet that person won’t make a confession of his faith, and that person will not follow Jesus in believers baptism, and that person does not love the Bible, and that person does not pray, and that person does not witness, and that person has no changed life, and that person does not love the brethren. You can just mark it down, he is just deceiving himself if he says that he’s saved. He has not really been converted.

I want to reiterate what we said in the outset of this message, lest I be misunderstood. James is not saying, as you understand James, that a man is saved by works. But, he’s saying that faith that saves always produces works, if it’s real.

Now, let’s leave James a moment and go to Ephesians chapter 2 verses 8 and 9 for a moment. And, I think you’ll see three prepositions that will make that abundantly clear. Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 9 and 10. All right, Ephesians 2 and verse 8: *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8–10).*

Now, there are three prepositions, I want you just take your pen and circle there in these verses, and if you get this down, you’ll have it down, and you’ll know things that a lot of people don’t know. The three words are—look at it—first of all, *by*, the little preposition *by*, for by grace. All right, the next preposition, *through* faith. Circle the word *through*. And, the next preposition is down in verse 10, *unto* good works. *By*, *through* and *unto*. You’re saved by grace, through faith, unto good works. The works don’t save. The grace saves. Faith lays hold upon that grace and works in us those works.

Now, go back to James again, the second chapter. And, James gives two examples and one illustration of what he’s talking about. Remember, we’re saying that it’s a dead faith because it has no real conversion in it. He mentions three illustrations, first of all, he mentions Abraham, in verse 21: *“Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God” (James 2:21–23).*

Now watch it. When did God say to Abraham, or when does the Bible say that Abraham believed God and it was imputed to him for righteousness? That was in

Genesis 15. When did Abraham offer Isaac? That was in Genesis 22, 30 years later. Now, what is James saying? James is saying what happened in Genesis chapter 15 was made evident to men in Genesis chapter 22. You see, in Genesis chapter 15, Abraham said he believed God. In Genesis chapter 22, Abraham showed that he believed God. Do you know how the amplified Bible interprets verse 24? It says this, that Abraham showed himself to be justified by his works. He showed himself, not that he was justified, but he showed that he was justified. James is talking about showing it, justification before men.

And, so James is not saying that Abraham got right with God in Genesis chapter 22. Even he himself points back to Genesis chapter 15. But, he is saying what happened in 15 was made evident in 22, and what happens to you there in that pew when you open your heart and receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior is often made evident up therein that baptistery.

And, I say dear friend, if you don't have enough of what it takes to get you out of that seat and down here and up there, and out there serving the Lord, whatever it is you have isn't real salvation, but that doesn't save you. That just simply justifies you before men. That's all.

Now, the next illustration he gives is Rahab, the harlot, because Abraham—everybody thought Abraham, well my goodness, he's got a lot of good work, and then God goes from saint to street walker who became a saint. And, he shows how Rahab the harlot didn't just simply say that she believed, but she laid her life on the line and took a risk because she believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. And, then he gives after these two examples, he gives an illustration. And, the illustration is an illustration of a dead body.

And, I'm going to hurry and try and get through for our radio audience, you can be thankful for that radio audience. All right, and then he gives one example here in verse 26. *"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also"* (James 2:26).

Now, he uses the illustration of a dead body, and the body represents faith, but the works represent life in that body. So, here's a body, and we'll call the body the faith body. Now, how are we going to know whether the body is dead or alive. Well, we can call it anything we want, but if it doesn't move around it's dead.

Now, you take a body down there on the ground, Jim, you lie down and be dead. Now, that's all right, you just sit there. All right, so here's a body on the ground. Now, we're going to call it a faith body. So, we'll say its faith body. That means it has life in it, but it's still dead. Why, look, we say it has faith, we say it has life, but it just lies there, it doesn't do anything. Ha, you see, it doesn't matter what you say about it, you're not going to give it life by saying things about it.

Conclusion

Abraham Lincoln asked a little boy if a dog has four legs, and you call his tale a leg, then how many legs will he have? The little fellow said five, and Abraham Lincoln said, “No, four, it doesn’t matter what you call his tail, it’s still a tail.” You can call it a leg if you want to, see.

And, so you can say—you can call that a faith body, but it’s not really a faith body ’cause if it had a faith body it’d have life in it, ’cause faith brings light. Well, then there’s another body down here, and it starts to move. It’s breathing ,and it’s squirming, and it’s kicking, it may be standing, walking, talking, acting. Now, this body is alive, and the way that we know that it’s alive is just simply that it has actions.

Now, you say, that’s such a stupid illustration. Well, I didn’t give it, James gave it. And, it’s not really stupid, it is so simple. Now, a body does not have life by acting. It acts because it has life. You can’t take a body and manipulate it, and give it life by moving it’s members, but if that body had life it’s going to move.

Now, the life is the gift of God, salvation is the gift of God, and when a man is saved, it’s going to change his life. That’s the reason I want to repeat what we said before, if you’re religion hasn’t changed your life, you better change your religion because faith without works is D E A D, dead. It has no compassion, it has not communion, and therefore it has had no conversion. Let’s bow together in prayer.

The Awesome Power of the Spoken Word

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: December 4, 1991

Main Scripture Text: James 3:1–12

Sponsored by: Sponsor

“Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!”

JAMES 3:5

Outline

Introduction

I. The Negative Power of the Tongue

II. The Positive Power of the Tongue

Conclusion

Introduction

Take God’s Word, please, and open, if you would, to be the book of James. And right away you know if we’re in the book of James, we’re into something very practical and very hard-hitting. And tonight, indeed, it will be. James chapter 3. I want to speak to you tonight on the awesome power of the spoken word.

James chapter 3, verse 1: “My brethren, be not many masters (the word *master* here means “teacher”), knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.” Be very careful before you, ah, say forth to teach somebody, because when you say do and don’t do, you receive the greater judgment. “For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses’ mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? Either a vine, figs? So can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.”

Now the most dangerous animal known to man, in my estimation, lives in a den made of ivory right behind your teeth and my teeth. The tongue, the Bible teaches, is something that is often out of control and needs to be controlled before the rest of us can be controlled. The Bible has so much to say about the tongue. As a matter of fact, when God gave Ten Commandments, two of them dealt with the use of the tongue – one that forbids taking God’s name in vain, and the other that forbids bearing false witness. When God lists seven things that are an abomination to Him, two of the seven deal with our words. Words are so important. Your tongue is so important. Today, in our age, we hear a lot about speaking with tongues or speaking in tongues or glossolalia, and some people are saying that’s a sign that you’re spiritual. That’s not true. As a matter of fact, the most carnal church that Paul had was a church that majored in tongue speaking, the church at Corinth. The sign that you’re spiritual is not that you can speak in an unknown tongue; the sign that you’re spiritual is you can control the one tongue you have. That, my dear friend, the Bible says if you can control that tongue, you are a perfect person. And the word *perfect* here does not mean sinless. It means you have grown up. The word *perfect* means “mature,” a person who has grown in the stature of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now your tongue is an awesome thing for good or for evil.

I. The Negative Power of the Tongue

Now the Bible speaks of the negative power of the tongue, and the Bible warns against such things as lying, for example. And let’s look at some Scriptures tonight.

Turn with me, please, to Proverbs, ah, chapter 6 and I want to show you what I alluded to, ah, just a little while back. Proverbs chapter 6 and verse 16. And, by the way, we’re going to look at a lot of Scripture, so get your Bibles out tonight, and I want you to enjoy turning them, ah, to them with me. “These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him.” Now I, I hope that you’re wise enough not to do something that God calls abominable and will cause Him to hate it. Now look, if you will, in verse 19: “A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.” If you’re not a truth-teller, you are an abomination. If you tell lies, you’re a false witness. If you spread discord among brethren, my dear friend, you are living in a realm that God literally hates. I mean, it’s on God’s hit list. It is an abomination to Him. Yet we live in a world today where a man’s word means so little, whether it’s a peace

treaty between nations, whether it's a business contract, or where it's, whether it's a marriage contract and vows that are so easily broken and discarded.

Well, you say, "Pastor, I wouldn't do any of those things." But I have to ask myself constantly as a preacher and as a father, as a citizen, am I a man of impeccable truth? Do I tell the truth? Many people tell, what they call, white lies. Now, my dear friend, lies don't come in colors. A lie is a lie is a lie. There are parents right here tonight who'll be lying to their children this Christmas season about some pot-bellied, red-faced, white-whiskered old man. Don't do it. If you want to play a game about Santa Claus, tell them it's a game. They'll enjoy it just as much. But, my dear friend, if they can't trust you when you tell about St. Nick, how are they going to trust you when you tell them about Jesus? You speak truth. And, by the way, why should some old, fat, pot-bellied man get the credit for the gifts you bought, anyway? (laughter). Take that love to yourself. Speak the truth.

Now, you know, ah, we need to raise children in a realm of truth. Some of you fuzz-buster daddies (laughter), hmmm, are teaching children how to live a lie. And sometimes we don't even realize what we're doing.

I heard about a mother one time who told her little boy, "Son, if you don't stop telling lies, they're going to send you to the moon. And there's an old man up there who is green who is going to make you pick up sticks the rest of your life if you don't stop telling lies."

The doorbell rings. "Go to the door and tell them Mommy's not home." "Mommy says she's not home" (laughter). We teach them to lie for us and then we punish them for lying to us. "Putting away lying, let every man speak truth with his mother." Why does a man lie? Two reasons: the fear of man, and no fear of God. Tell the truth!

Not only the sin of lying, but the sin of cursing. Exodus chapter 20 and verse 7 says, "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain..." Oh well, you say, "Pastor, I, I, ah, curse a little bit, but that's not so bad." My dear friend, the same Bible that says "Thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not kill," says, "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain..." And the reason that you take God's name in vain is, and the we, reason you profane God's name is you have a profane heart. "Out of the abundance of the mouth the heart speaketh." Profanity shows a profane heart and an empty head. When a man steals, at least he gets what he steals. When a man commits adultery, at least he assonates his lust. When a man kills, at least he gets his revenge. What does a man get when he takes God's name in vain? I mean, it's like a fish biting a hook with no bait on it. I mean, it's bad enough to bite a hook and get in a frying pan for a shrimp. But when you absolutely get nothing but the judgment of God, why would an individual take the name of God in vain? Again, not only telling lies, again, not only profanity, but criticism, unjust criticism is a sin that God

precisely forbids.

Go back to the book of James, if you will, where we began and look, if you will, in James chapter 4 and verse 11. Look at it. “Speak not evil one of another, brethren...” Do you see that? “Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.”

So many times, when we speak evil of someone else, we’re so ignorant. We don’t know what we’re talking about. It is sheer gossip. Only Christians, they, they don’t gossip; they just share prayer requests, you know.

Someone wrote these words: “I am more deadly than the screaming shell from the howitzer. I win without killing. I tear down homes, break hearts, and wreck lives. I travel on the wings of the wind. No innocence is strong enough to intimidate me. No purity pure enough to daunt me. I have no regard for truth, no respect for justice, no mercy for the defenseless. My victims are as numerous as the sands of the sea and often as innocent. I never forget and seldom forgive. My name is gossip.” Gossip!

But, you know, I’ve learned a long time ago that it really does little good to talk about gossip and to preach about gossip because nobody thinks they gossip. They always think it’s the other person that gossips. They will say to you, “You know me now. You know I don’t gossip,” and then they’ll begin. Listen.

The Bible says we’re not to speak to evil one of another, brethren. And it’s especially true about those who are serving the Lord. The Lord warns very clearly in 1st Timothy chapter 5, verse 19: “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.” Psalm 105, verse **15**. The Bible says, “Touch not Mine anointed and do My prophets no harm.” You say, “Pastor, is somebody on your case?” Not that I know of. But if you are, here’s a verse for you.

Or any servant of God. Any servant of God. How careful we must be.

Criticism, I believe, reveals a very wicked heart. The sin of criticism is rarely found in useful servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. My dear friend, the Bible says in Galatians chapter 6 and verse 1: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” And Jesus said in John chapter 8 and verse 7: “...He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone...” I don’t think there’s anything that causes the work of Christ to suffer more than murmuring, criticizing, judging, gossiping, speaking evil of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

When I was only in high school, I believe, I first heard these words: I stood on the streets of a busy town watching men tearing a building down. With a hoe, he hoe, and a lusty yell they swung a beam and a side wall fell. I asked the foreman of the crew, “Are those men as skilled as those you’d hire if you wanted to build?” Ha, ah, “No, no,

indeed," he said,"just common laborers all I need. I can tear down as much in a day or two as it would take skilled men a year to do."

You see, it's so easy, it's so easy to criticize. It's so difficult to build. It doesn't take much size to criticize. You say, "Pastor, if I have something that needs to be said, don't you think I ought to say it?" Certainly, but you ought to make careful that you have the right motive. And you ought to be doubly careful that you go to the right person. And go to that person first of all. Sometimes people come to me to try to tell me something about thus-and-such a person. And I say, "Well, wh, have you told them?" "Well, no." "Well, go tell them and then come tell me." Tell them first. Go with the right motive. Go to the right person. Go at the right time. Go at the right place. Make sure that you have the right facts. And be very certain that you have the right spirit.

Churches today, we have some churches in our association that are in serious trouble. And the very reason, my dear friend, is the members of those churches have tongues that are loose on both ends and hinged in the middle. The Bible says in Proverbs chapter 26 and verse 20: "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out. And where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth." You say, "Well, I don't originate it. I just pass it on." That's like saying, "I don't print counterfeit money. I just spend it."

Oh, my dear friend, the Bible says that God hates him that soweth discord among brethren.

II. The Positive Power of the Tongue

Well, enough about that. The negative power of the Word. The negative power of the Word. The Bible says with our words we can curse. Ah, but the awesome, positive power of a spoken word. Words are powerful, so incredibly powerful.

Did you know that God created the universe with words? The Bible says in Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 3, "...the worlds were framed by the word of God..." As a matter of fact, go back to the book of Genesis sometimes and just read the record of creation. God said, "Let there be light," and was light. God spoke a world into existence with His words. God said it and it was so.

And not only does God create with His words; God controls with His words. The Bible says that God upholds all things with the word of His power, with His word! When the Lord Jesus Christ was here on earth, you see, the Lord Jesus ruling with words. Why, you read there in Mark chapter 11 where Jesus passed by and there was a fig tree. And there was no fruit on the fig tree. And Jesus talked to the tree. Jesus said, "No fruit will grow on you from henceforth." Now what kind of man goes around talking to trees? Jesus saw a mountain there. And the Lord Jesus said in Matthew chapter 17, "You can say to this mountain, say to this mountain, 'Be thou removed and be cast into the sea,' and it'll be done." Move mountains with words. Wither trees with words. You

see, your words are so very important.

Look, if you will, for example, in, ah, Matthew 12. Let's just turn to this verse, Matthew chapter 12, for a moment. Here's a warning that our Lord Jesus gave. Look, if you will, in verse 36: "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak shall they give account thereof in the day of judgment." My soul! Every idle word!

I was going through some old things here a while back, and I found a bunch of old tapes, years old; I mean, like 35 years old of preaching that I had done. Not cassette tapes. I'm talking about reels now. Can, you remember the old kind? I know you think mine were in hieroglyphics or something, but (laughter) I put one of them on. And there I was. Every sentence, every syllable, every nuance – why, a puny man can do that. What do you think it's going to be like when we get to the judgment seat? ...every idle word that men shall speak shall they give account thereof in the day of judgment."

Now continue to read. Matthew chapter 12 and verse **37**: "For by thy words thou shalt thou be justified, and by thy words shalt thou be condemned." Now that's what Jesus said. That's an incredible thing. It's your words that show what you are. How are your words, how do your words justify you? Well, I'll give you an example. We preach down here. We'll preach tonight and finish and ask somebody to come and receive Christ as his personal Savior and Lord. Suppose a person comes down this aisle and says, ah, "All right. I'm interested in giving my heart to Christ." And so we open the Bible and we share with him how to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. And we open the Bible and say, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." So we share the plan of salvation with a person. We say, "Do you believe that Jesus Christ is raised from the dead? Do you believe He died for your sins, buried, raised again the third day?" That's the gospel. "Do you believe that?" "Yes, I believe that." "Well, ah, will you ask Christ to save you?" "Yes, I will." "All right. Pray and ask Him to come into your heart. Pray after me. Lord Jesus." "Lord Jesus." "I open my heart." "I open my heart." "I receive You." "I receive You." And so forth. Fine. "Are you saved?" "I don't think so." Well, he's not. He's absolutely right. He got it right. "But why are you not saved?" "I don't know. I just don't think I am." He's right. He's not.

Somebody else. "You want to receive Christ?" "Yes, I do." "Pray after me. Dear Lord." "Dear Lord." "I'm a sinner." "I'm a sinner." "I'm lost." "I'm lost." "I need to be saved. I want to be saved. Lord Jesus, I trust You." "Lord Jesus, I trust You." "Are you saved?" "Yes, I sure am." "Why are you saved?" "Because I've trusted Christ." "You sure you're saved?" "I sure am." Is he? He sure is. Why? Because whatever he says, God says amen to, what....

You see, confession is made unto salvation. Confession brings possession.

Confession is just faith turned inside out. You say you're not. God says, "That's right. You're not." You say you are. God says, "That's right. You are." "With the heart man believes unto righteousness, with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

We need to learn by our words we are justified or by our words we are condemned. Your words can bless or your words can curse. Go back to James, the third chapter, again and look at it. It won't hurt you to turn to it. Go ahead. You need the exercise. James chapter 3. Look in verse 8: "But the tongue can no man tame..." Now that doesn't mean that you have an excuse for a wild tongue. God can tame it. It's just simply saying human effort is not enough. "But the tongue can no man tame: it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." Now what this: "Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God."

Now did you know that words can bless or words can curse? Did you know that you can bless your children or curse your children with your words? The words that come out of your mouth are vehicles. You can say to a child, "You'll never amount to anything." You just put a curse on that child. You can say a child, "You're no good." You put a curse on that child. You can say to a child things that you can, perhaps, not even begin to realize the impact that that can have on that child's life for evil or for good. Every word that you speak is either a productive word or an idle word. It is a word that blesses or a word that tears down. Your words are building blocks that Jesus or Satan will use. You're going to bless or you're going to curse with your words. That's what James says.

Now you're making either a good or a bad confession all of the days of your life. You know, in, in Hebrews chapter 3 and verse 1, the Lord Jesus is called, "...the High Priest of our confession, the High Priest of our confession," or, "...the High Priest of our profession..." Same thing. He's our High Priest. Now what does a high priest do? Well, a high priest takes that which the people offer and he offers it to God. That's what a priest does. The people bring their sacrifices. The priest takes those sacrifices and he offers them to the Father on behalf of the people. He is a priest.

Now Jesus is the High Priest of our confession. What does He have to offer to the Father? Your confession. Your confession. He is the High Priest of that, whatever you confess, whatever you profess. That's what you give the Lord Jesus to offer to the Father. He is presenting to the Father what we say.

Now Satan is listening for a bad confession. Because when you give a bad confession, an idle word, a curse that doesn't have to be profanity; it can be just a negative curse, an unedifying word, what you do is actually give Satan room for his demons to pick up on that and work against you and your family.

You see, turn to Matthew chapter 10 here for a moment. Let me show you something. Look in verse 32. Jesus said, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before

men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.” Do you see how He is the High Priest of your confession? You confess Jesus. He says, “Thank you. I’m the High Priest. I just offer that to the Father. I have taken what you have given Me and I offer it to the Father.”

But look, if you will, in verse 33: “But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.” All that Jesus can offer to the Father is what you give Him to offer to the Father. You give Him denial. As the High Priest, He says, “Here’s the offering – denial.” You give Him confession. As the High Priest, He offers that confession. You know what we need to be confessing every day? Victory! Praise! Strength! Joy! That’s something our Lord can offer to the Father and make real.

Your words have awesome power. To confess the Lord Jesus is not an act; it is an attitude. It is a way of life. In every situation, every circumstance, all of life, let your words be words that exalt, that lift, that edify, that praise so that Jesus can take those words and build on them. That’s the reason that praise is so important. Psalm 145 and verse 10 says, “All thy works shall praise thee...”

A lot of people are mentally ill because they haven’t learned how to praise. Criticism and negativism and introspection and self-centeredness causes people to be preoccupied with themselves and bankrupt self. Friend, in you and in me is no good thing. If you’re self-centered, you’re going to be in a lot of trouble. Praise makes you God-centered. And the thing praise is not truly praise, in my estimation, till it reaches the lips. It’s only insipient praise until it reaches the lips and you begin to praise and articulate that praise. And, as I’ve told you, in Psalm 22, verse 3, God occupies the praise of His people.

Now what are you offering to God? I mean, what are you offering to God. I want to tell you, a priest does what? He takes the sacrifices of the people and offers them to the Father. Final verse: Hebrews chapter 13, verse 15: “By him (he word by literally means through Him, through Jesus) let us offer sacrifices of praise continually, that is, the fruit of our lips...” The fruit of your lips. Your lips are bearing fruit. By Him, through Him, Jesus, let us offer the sacrifice of praise and do it continually. Friend, right in there is awesome power, but it shows what’s right in here, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

Conclusion

Let’s bow in prayer. It used to be when you go to the doctor, and, I guess, sometimes today, he’d give you an examination. He says, “Stick out your tongue.” He puts that depressor on it and looks in your mouth. I think the Great Physician would like to examine your tongue right now. Are you a critical person? Are you a harsh person? Are you a negative person? Are you a judgmental person? Are you a gossip? Have you

been putting curses on your wife, your children, your husband? Are your words idle words? Why don't you do a little business with God right now? I'm going to wait and let God do some business with me.

I heard about a country man one time who prayed, "Lord, help me to cooperate with You so you won't have to operate on me." And that might be a good thing for all of us to pray right now. We wait for just a few moments.

Thank You, Lord, for the blood of Jesus that cleanses. Thank You, Lord, that You go to the source, the heart, and put joy and peace there, for, Lord, You've said, "Out of the abundance of the mouth the, the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Oh Father, work a work in each of us and start in this pastor. In the name of Jesus we pray, amen.

The Meanest Member in our Church

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: July 30, 1978

Main Scripture Text: James 3:1–12

“And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.”

JAMES 3:6

Outline

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- I. The Influence of the Tongue
 - A. The Tongue is like a Bit in a Horse’s Mouth
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 - III. The Inconsistency of the Tongue
- Conclusion

Introduction

Thank you, Brother Gilbert. Would you take your Bibles please now, and turn to James chapter 3 as we continue our journey with James. He has left us bruised and bleeding, but blessed. And, I want to read the first 12 verses of chapter 3. James chapter 3: *“My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation”—*that is, don’t just jump up and profess to be a religious teacher, because one day what you teach is going to come under the close scrutiny of the judgment of God—*“For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses’ mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm”—*or rudder—*“whithersoever the governor listeth”—*

that means wherever the captain wants the ship to go—“*Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh*” (James 3:1–12).

I want to speak this morning on this subject, “The Meanest Member in our Church.” Would you like to look around and cast a vote? The meanest member in our church.

Now, some people are very mean. When I was a little boy, my mother used to tell me of a man who was so mean that he gave his little boy a penny to go to bed without any supper. And, then in the middle of the night, that man stole that penny from his son. In the morning—he scolded the son for losing the penny, whipped him, and made him go without breakfast. Well, I thought that was perhaps the meanest man I’d ever heard of. But, there’s something even meaner than that. I want to speak about the meanest member in our church.

And, if you’re wondering who it is, I want you to look in verse 6: “*And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members...*” (James 3:6). The tongue is the meanest member in our church. The tongue is a fire and a world of iniquity. And, I want us to think this morning about the tongue, the subject that is in everybody’s mouth. And, so it refers to you and to me. So, I want you to listen very carefully.

I. The Influence of the Tongue

James says three things about the tongue. First of all, he speaks of the influence of the tongue. And, then James speaks of the iniquity of the tongue. And, then James speaks of the inconsistency of the tongue. So, I want you to notice those three things. First of all, I want you to notice the influence of the tongue.

Now, James is saying the tongue, though it be very small, is very powerful, and very influential, and therefore the tongue should be handled with care. The tongue can direct, the tongue can destroy, the tongue can delight, the tongue is a very powerful thing. And, James illustrates that by showing us three very small things that have great influence.

A. **The Tongue is like a Bit in a Horse's Mouth**

First of all, he says the tongue is like a bit in a horse's mouth. Look in verse 3. He says, *"Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body"* (James 3:3). Can you imagine? Here's a little lady riding a great fiery steed, a powerful horse, and with just that little piece of metal in his mouth, she makes him go this way or that way. She makes him start, and she makes him stop. Just a little piece of metal controls the whole horse. Some of us had difficulty learning that.

When my wife and I went to Ridgecrest, North Carolina as teenagers—of course, she wasn't my wife then—but as we went there we rented some horses. And, I thought that would be wonderful to go on a horseback ride. I didn't know anything about horses. But, her horse wouldn't go. I said, "Joyce let me show you how—what to do." And, I got on the horse, and took hold of his ear, and twisted it. It was a very long ride. Finally—finally—after going all over North Carolina, that horse came to a stop, and I learned that they put bits in horse's mouths—not ears on horse's heads—to control horses. But, a very small bit can control a very big horse.

And, what is James saying? James is saying a word—just a small word, just a bit of a word—can control sometimes the destiny of a man.

One time a preacher was preaching in a congregation. After the congregation, a young man came up to him and said, "Sir, I want to thank you for leading me to Jesus Christ." The minister looked at the man and did not recognize him and said, "I'm sorry, I don't remember when. Would you tell me about it?" He said, "I wouldn't expect you to remember but," he said, "years ago you were standing on a street corner talking to a friend of yours, who happened to be a friend of mine also, and I came up and the three of us were engaged in conversation, and you turned to me, and you didn't know me, but you asked me, 'Young man, are you a Christian?' And, I said, 'No, I'm not.'" "And," he said, "you looked at me and said, 'That's such a shame. You're such a fine looking young man to be lost and to be going to Hell.' And, that's all you said to me. "But," he said, "Sir, that was many years ago, and I have never been able to get that statement out of my heart, and out of my mind, and it was etched upon my soul; it thundered in my heart until I received the Jesus Christ as my personal Savior."

B. **The Tongue is like a Rudder on a Ship**

Oh, if we could only understand sometimes the power of just one sentence, just a bit of speech. But, not only does James say that the tongue is like a bit in a horse's mouth. He also says that the tongue is like a rudder on a mighty ship. And, look in verse 4. He says in verse 4: *"Behold, also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet they're turned about by a very small rudder"* (James 3:4). Just a little rudder can change a mighty ship, can change the direction of something so large. And,

what James is saying, your speech is this way. Speech is such a powerful thing. The power of speech, and the power of oratory, is unbelievable.

Think of Dr. Robert G. Lee and the silver tongue that God has given this man. Think of the lives that have been blessed and brought to Jesus. Think of multitudes that have been swayed, think of conventions and great masses of people—more than by Dr. Lee’s pen, Dr. Lee’s tongue was so powerful. And, then think of Adolph Hitler. Think of Adolph Hitler and his rantings and his ravings, and demonical, and maniacal speeches, as he would whip the people of Germany into a frenzy. Think of the power of the tongue, the tongue like the rudder of a ship can bring that ship, buffeted and tossed by the waves and winds, into a safe harbor. Or, the tongue in the hands of a wrong person can bring the ship of life upon the rocks and the reefs of disaster and destruction. James is saying, “Never underestimate the power of the tongue.” It is so small, but so powerful.

C. **The Tongue is like a Spark in Dry Grass**

And, then James gives the third illustration of the power of the tongue. He says not only is it like a bit in the horse’s mouth, not only is it like a rudder on a mighty ship, but James also says that the tongue is like a spark in dry grass. Look, if you will, in verse 5: *“Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!”* (James 3:5). We sing a chorus, “It only takes a spark to get a fire going” (Kurt Kaiser).

And, James is saying how you use your tongue—because your tongue is like a torch. It is incendiary that tongue of yours. You see, a fire doesn’t have to be great and large to begin with.

Back in 1871, a Mrs. O’Leary was milking her cow in a barn in Chicago. And, the cow kicked over Mrs. O’Leary lantern, and that lantern caught the hay in that barn on fire. And, Mrs. O’Leary was not able to put it out. By the time that fire was finally controlled, 17,450 buildings in the city of Chicago were destroyed. One cow kicks over a lantern, 17,450 destroyed. The entire downtown part of Chicago wiped out by the great Chicago fire. Over 250 people lost their lives.

A small fire can become a big fire. And, a few words wrongly used can bring such devastation, and such destruction. Words are like fire, and fire is a wonderful servant. We couldn’t have civilization as we know it without fire. But, fire is a poor master. Fire can warm, or fire can burn. Words can bless, or words can burn. Words can warm a heart, or words can inflame hatred. There’s a chain reaction. That’s what James is saying.

Have you ever noticed the chain reaction of words? Let me give you a hypothetical situation. Here is a man, we’ll call him Mr. Sparks. Now, Mr. Sparks is a business

executive. And, he's been at the helm of this business for many years, and he's quite proud of the way he runs his business. Always punctual, and always on top of everything. But, one day Mr. Sparks is at the country club having lunch, and he gets engrossed in a conversation, and then he looks at his watch and he realizes that he's ten minutes late getting back to the office. He almost drops his coffee cup, he jumps in his high-powered automobile, and he starts off down the expressway doing 90 miles an hour, and he's stopped by a policeman. And, this policeman gives Mr. Sparks a tongue-lashing and at the same time he writes a ticket.

Now, Mr. Sparks is infuriated. He's saying, "Why isn't that policeman out there catching criminals, and crooks and murderers? Why is he picking on me, a law-abiding citizen? I may have been going 90 miles an hour, but I was doing it safely." And, so when he gets back to the office he's still muttering. He calls in his chief sales director and he says, "Armstrong, come in here. I want to ask you a question. Did you get that contract settled that I gave you?" Armstrong says, "No, sir. We lost that contract." He said, "What do you mean you lost that contract?" He said, "Don't you know how much money that could have been to our company? Don't you know that this could have opened a whole new field of development? Armstrong, I want you to know something. You may have been here for 17 years, but you're not irreplaceable. Now, you had better get that business made up and replace it, or we will replace you."

Armstrong is infuriated. He says to himself, muttering, "That old codger, that rascal. He doesn't do anything around here, he's just a pompous figurehead. I'm the one that gets all the business for this company. I'm the one that made all the business for this company. Why, without me it would fail. What a cheap shot to threaten to fire me." He gets his secretary on the phone, "Mrs. Jones," he says, "Did you get those five letters that I gave you this morning, done?" She says, "No sir, I haven't. You told me that this matter was to take precedence." "Mrs. Jones, when I give you letters to be done, I want them to be done. I want those five letters now; do you understand me? You get those letters on my desk. You may have been here seven years Mrs. Jones, but secretaries are easy to get." Bang.

Mrs. Jones is burning. "The nerve of that guy. He told me to do something else and now he blames me for not having those five measly letters. Well, I'll get his letter all right." She goes down to the switchboard operator and says, "Listen, I need some help and I need it now. I've got some letters that have to be typed, so you just turn loose of what you're doing and help me type these letters. After all, you don't do anything anyway except sit around here and answer the telephone, whenever it happens to ring. We do all the work, and if you can't help me, I'll find someone else who can." You talk about being hot!

The switchboard operator says, "Can you imagine? All they do in the back office is

sit around and drink coffee. I've got more calls coming in here. Nobody could handle this switchboard but me. I'm the lowest paid person on this staff, and I do the most work. The nerve!" Boy, is she mad.

She drives home after work. There's her little twelve-year-old son lying on his tummy on the floor watching television. The first thing she sees is a tear in his blue jeans. She said, "Would you look at that. You have torn your blue jeans. You go upstairs. There's no supper for you tonight, and no television for you tonight. Look what you've done." Boy, you talk about being mad.

The little fellow is angry. "Why," he says, "what right does she have? I tore my britches cleaning up the yard like she told me to do. I was doing something for her. Boy, she sure is a misunderstanding mama." And, he goes upstairs, and about that time the tomcat comes past. Whomp, he gets a kick. "You get out of here," he says to the tomcat. "You've probably been up to something no good." Knowing the tomcat he probably had.

Now, wouldn't it have been a whole lot simpler if Mr. Sparks had simply come directly from the country club to the home of the telephone operator and kicked the cat himself. I mean, wouldn't it? Wouldn't that have cut out a lot of in between things? That's exactly what James is saying. James is talking about chain reactions. James is talking about the power of the tongue, and James says, "...Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" (James 3:5). So, James is saying about the tongue, you handle the tongue with care, because one of these days every "idle word that men speak where they give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matthew 12:36).

II. The Iniquity of the Tongue

But, now not only does James speak to us about the influence of the tongue, like a bit, like a rudder, like a spark. But, he also speaks to us about the iniquity of the tongue, the iniquity of the tongue. Look in verses 6 through 8: "*And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.*" (James 3:6–8).

A. The Tongue Pollutes

And, now James, who is the master illustrator, uses several figures of speech again to describe this time, not the influence of the tongue, but the iniquity of the tongue. One of the figures of speech he uses is this: He says the tongue defiles like a broken sewer. Look at it in verse 6: "It defileth the whole body." Defiled by your tongue. The tongue

pollutes like a dripping, broken sewer pipe. The greatest ecological problem in America is the problem of words, wrongly used that defile the whole body.

Are you guilty of using filthy, dirty speech? You know, somehow today the people who are speaking the most about free speech sound like they fought at Valley Forge. And, they think that free speech means the right that they can open their mouths like a sewer, and pour out all of their filth, and all of their dirt, and all of their garbage wherever they want. And, James says the tongue pollutes, it defiles. You beware of the sewer mouth, the gutter mouth.

B. The Tongue Destroys

But, then not only that, James says not only does it defile, like a sewer, it destroys like a hellish arsonist. Look in verse 6 again. He says, *“And the tongue is a fire”*—and, then he says in the last part of verse 6, it—*“setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell”* (James 3:6).

There are people who deliberately, and hellishly, and hurtfully, and hatefully use their tongues to destroy the lives of other people. You may wish to write in your margin Proverbs 16, verses 27 and 28 by this verse, by verse 6. Here’s what that verse says: *“An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is a burning fire. A perverse man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends”* (Proverbs 16:27–28). The fire of the tongue.

Oh, we talked about arsonists a few weeks ago. Are you guilty of using your tongue in a form of arson? So many people who would not think of using vulgar language, so many cultured ladies who sit around drinking pink tea, and discussing flower arrangements, use their two-inch tongue as a fire. They don’t use vulgar language, they just gossip, and snipe, and criticize. The ladies raid society. And, men, how many times we speak about men as gossips, or women as gossips. Some of the worst gossips I’ve ever known are men, and some of them ministers.

I heard about a lady one time who went to the newspaper office to put something in the society column, and she happened to lean up against a wall where there was a freshly printed piece of newsprint, or at least a type, and it printed on the back of her dress. She didn’t know that it had, but it printed on the back of her dress these words: *“Daily News.”* All day long people were snickering at her, laughing at her, pointing; she knew something was wrong. Finally, when she got home she said to her husband, *“Would you please look on the back of my dress, and see if there’s anything there that ought not to be there.”* He looked and said, *“No, ma’am, nothing at all.”*

The tongue is a fire. Morgan Blake, who was a sportswriter for the *Atlanta Journal* said this: *“I am more deadly than the screaming shell from the Howitzer. I win without killing. I tear down homes, break hearts and wreck lives. I travel on the wings of the*

wind. No innocence is strong enough to intimidate me, no purity is strong enough to daunt me. I have no regard for truth, no respect for justice, no mercy for the defenseless. My victims are as numerous as the sands of the sea, and often as innocent. I never forget and seldom forgive. My name is gossip.”

C. The Tongue Devours

The tongue is a fire, and it destroys like a hellish arsonist. And, then next James says that the tongue devours like a wild beast. Look in verses 7 and 8: *“For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame...”* (James 3:7–8). And, he says here now, the tongue is like a wild, ferocious, untamable beast. It may be very small, it lives in an ivory cage, but it breaks forth, and that boneless tongue can crush and kill and hurt.

Boys and girls sometimes say, “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me.” But, words do hurt, they do hurt. And, all the protestations can’t take it away. The tongue is like a beast that devours. Paul said, and you might jot this scripture down, Galatians chapter 5, verse 15. Paul said this, *“But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another”* (Galatians 5:15). Isn’t that a strange thing to write to Christians? “If you bite and devour one another.” Christian cannibalism—consuming one another like animals, ferocious animals that are biting and destroying. Some people have had terror struck in their hearts by a movie called *Jaws*. I suggest something more dangerous is a church member that I call “Monster Mouth.” Like a wild beast, the meanest member in the church.

D. The Tongue Deadens

And, then not only does James say that it pollutes, not only does James say that it destroys, and not only does James say that it devours, but he also says that it deadens like a vile poison. Look in verse 8: *“But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison”* (James 3:8). Oh, did you know that you can poison with your tongue? You can kill with your tongue. Proverbs 18, verse 21 says, *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue...”* (Proverbs 18:21).

You can kill, surely, with your tongue. You dip your tongue in the slime of the sewer, and with that forketh tongue you assassinate somebody’s character. You’re guilty of murder. “The man who with the breath lent him by Heaven speaks words that soil the whiteness of a life is but a murderer. For death is given as surely by the tongue, as by the knife” (Jean Blewett).

A lady went to the doctor for an examination. She felt terrible. The doctor got a very serious expression on his face and said, “Madam, I hate to tell you this, but you have rabies.” She got out her notebook and started making a list. He said, “What are you

doing? Making out your will?” She said, “No, I’m making a list of people I’m going to bite.”

There are people who are just that mean. A. B. Simpson said this. He was a great leader in the Christian Missionary Alliance Church. He said, “I had rather play with forked lightening, or take in my hands living wires with their fiery currents, than to speak a reckless word against any servant of Christ.” Have you been guilty of that?

A reckless word against any servant of Christ, or idly repeat the slanderous darts which thousands of Christians are hurling on others. Are you guilty of using your tongue to poison lives? I warn you that one day when you stand before Almighty God you will give an account. *“Every idle word that men speak, shall they give account thereof in the day of judgment”* (Matthew 12:36). By your words you’ll be condemned. By your words you’ll be justified. And, even as Christians we’re going to face the record, not in the sense of condemnation, but at the judgment seat of Christ.

III. The Inconsistency of the Tongue

Now, the third and final thing I want us to notice. Not only the influence of the tongue, and not only the iniquity of the tongue, but I want you to notice the inconsistency of the tongue. And, here’s the great problem.

Many of us who are members of this church love the Lord, and yet we’re so inconsistent with our lives. James found it in the early church, and it is true in churches down through history. Here’s what James says to those early Christians: *“Therewith”—that is with the tongue—“bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?”*—that literally means fresh water and salt water—*“Can the fig tree, my brethren”—he’s talking to brethren—“bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh”* (James 3:9–12).

And, here James speaks of those who are so inconsistent in the use of their tongues. And, he’s saying this inconsistency is impossible in the natural world, impossible in the physical world. When a spring doesn’t have salt water, and fresh water at the same time. That’s impossible in the physical world. A tree, if it’s an olive tree is not going to bear figs. That’s impossible in the physical world. It’s not going to happen. If the water is bitter, the well is bitter. The fruit and the tree are going to correspond, they’re going to be the same.

But, what James is saying is that what is impossible in the physical world ought not to be in the spiritual world. It’s improper in the spiritual world. It’s improper for you to come here on Sunday morning and praise God, and then leave here and criticize your brothers and sisters in Christ. That ought not to be. That’s what James is saying. It’s

amazing what happens ten minutes after the benediction in some churches. We go from the Gloria to gossip. We go from the creed to the criticism. We go from blessing God to criticizing men. James says you can't do that. Those things ought not to be.

A little girl had crawled up into her father's lap, and she put her arms around her father's neck, and she was hugging her father. But, then she looked over and saw her little brother sitting across the room, and remembered the grudge that she had with her little brother, and so at the same time while she was hugging her father she stuck out her tongue at her little brother behind her father's back. And, she's hugging her father at the same time. The mother saw it, and it infuriated the mother. And, she walked into the room and she said, "You take your arms from around your daddy's neck, you cannot love your daddy's neck and stick out your tongue at your daddy's son at the same time."

Now, that's what James is saying. That's exactly what James is saying: That you can't bless God and curse men at the same time. And, to curse men doesn't mean to cuss men. You can curse a man with criticism, you can curse a man with gossip. You can curse a man, you can place a curse upon his life with slander, and James is saying, "If you love God, then let it be shown in your speech toward other persons."

I tell you the sweetest thing on the face of this earth is a church where the glory of God is upon it. The love of God is being expressed, and tongues are not wagging. You say, "Brother Rogers, who's doing it around here?" No one that I know of, that's the reason I'm just preaching preventative medicine, preventative medicine. You say, "You sound like you've got a problem." I'm just preaching the Bible folks.

Conclusion

A lady called me up one time and said, "Preacher, were you preaching to me?" I said, "Dear lady, I was shooting down in a hole, if you were down in it, I can't help it. I just don't know." Frankly, I don't know, but I do know this: I know that there are people who are double-tongued. They are inconsistent in their Christian life. Some of them are great church workers.

But, James says, "These things ought not to be." We, as Christians ought to be consistent, consistent. Hasn't James given us a lesson about the influence of the tongue, and about the iniquity of the tongue, and the inconsistency of the tongue.

Well, what should we do about it? The Bible says if a man can bridle his tongue, the same is a mature man. But, then the Bible says the tongue can no man tame. Is that a contradiction in speech? Does James say on the one hand that the tongue can be bridled so we can be perfect or mature? And, then on the other hand James says the tongue can't be tamed. No, what James is saying the tongue can no man tame.

You can't tame your tongue. You cannot control your speech any more than I can control mine. You might as well try to control gunpowder in Hell as try to control your

tongue, apart from the aid of the Holy Spirit of God. You see, the Bible says that it is *“out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh”* (Luke 6:45). That’s what James is talking about. What’s in the root of the tree is going to show in the fruit of the tree. What’s in the well will show in the water.

And, James is saying that if we would really control our tongues, we must control our hearts, because, you see, while it is the bit that controls the horse, there’s someone who holds the reins. And, while it is the water that controls the ship, there’s someone who has his hand on the tiller. Is it self or is it the Holy Spirit?

The only way that you can have peace in your home is control your tongue, and the only way you can control your tongue is for you to be born again, for you to be saved. And, not only saved, but filled with the Holy Spirit. No man can tame the wicked tongue, no man his soul can save—only God—only God can cleanse the heart, and make the tongue behave. That’s true. You can’t make your tongue behave any more than you could save yourself. But, when you give your heart to Jesus, that ol’ tongue of yours, that no man can tame, can be tamed by the blessed, wonderful, Spirit of God. For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh. Let’s bow together in prayer.

Taming Your Tongue

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: January 9, 1994

Main Scripture Text: James 3:1–18

“Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!”

JAMES 3:5

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Dangerous Significance of Our Words
- II. The Defiant Stubbornness of Our Words
- III. The Deeper Source of Our Words
- IV. The Dynamic Strength of Our Words

Conclusion

Introduction

Turn to the book of James chapter 3—James chapter 3. In a moment, we’re going to begin reading in verse 1. I’m talking to you tonight on this subject, “Taming Your Tongue,” or “How to Tame Your Tongue,” or “How to Manage Your Mouth.”

You know, words are very, very important things. I learned that, in an average day the average American has about 30 different conversations. As a matter of fact, we talk so much that it is estimated that we spend 1/5th of our life talking. Twenty percent of our life we’re talking. If everything that the average person said is recorded in a year, they say that it would fill a library shelf of 66 books, 800 pages of rather fine print. That’s a lot of talking. And, somebody else has said that in the average day a man speaks about 20,000 words, a woman speaks about 30,000 words. Of course, the problem comes when the man comes home at night and he’s already used his 20,000 and she has 10,000 left. One man said, “Do you ever resent your wife for getting the last word?” He said, “No, I’m glad when she gets to it.” Your, you can get in trouble with words. I mean, your mouth can get you in serious trouble in, in a hurry. One young man was working in a supermarket. He was in the produce department. And a lady came in, and she said, “Young man, I would like one half head of lettuce.” He said, “Well, madam, I don’t think we could sell one half head of lettuce.” She said, “Young man, I said I want one half head of lettuce. Do you understand?” “Well,” he said, “pardon me, let me go check.” So he went back to the manager of the produce department, and said, “Boss,” said, “there’s

an old lady out here.” Said, “She’s got a face like a hatchet and, she, she’s a little funny. And she says she wants a half head of lettuce.” And he turned around and the woman was standing right behind him. But he said, “You know, boss, I think we’re in luck because this dear lady wants the other half.” After it was over, the boss sat him down and said, “Son, you’re, you’re a remarkable young man. That, that’s pretty good. You landed on your feet. You’re, you’re sharp. Maybe you could go places. Where are you from, son?” He said, “Saginaw, Michigan.” He said, “Oh.” Said, “What’s that known for?” “Oh,” he said, “great hockey teams and ugly women.” “Well,” he said, “son, my wife is from Saginaw, Michigan.” “Oh,” he said, “what team does she play for?” Your tongue can get you in a lot of trouble. As a matter of fact, the words you use, the way you speak is really a sign of your spiritual maturity.

Look, if you will, in verses 1 and 2: “My brethren, be not many masters—that is, teachers—knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all—and then notice this—If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.” Now the word perfect here doesn’t mean sinless. It’s the word teleos. It means “mature.” He’s saying if you can control your tongue, you are a mature person. And if you can control your tongue, you can take care of everything else.

I. The Dangerous Significance of Our Words

Now having said that, I want us to look, first of all, at what I’m going to call the dangerous significance of our words. Our words can be very, very dangerous. Look in verse 3: “Behold, we put bits in the horses’ mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.” Now here’s a 2,000, 2,500-pound horse with a jockey that may not weigh 100 pounds—the strong, mighty animal. And with that little piece of metal there near his tongue, and in his mouth, the entire horse is controlled.

And then he says in verse 4: “Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm—that means a rudder—whithersoever the governor listeth”—or desires. A little rudder, in spite of the wind and the waves and the forces and the tides, can control that great, huge ship. Even an ocean liner is turned and driven and controlled by something as small as a rudder.

Now here’s the thing I want you to understand about your tongue. Your tongue gives direction to your life. Just as a bite directs the horse, and just as the rudder directs the ship, your tongue determines where you’re going to end up. Your tongue! It’s like a bite in a horse’s mouth. It’s like a rudder to a ship. May I give you some advice tonight? If you don’t like where you’re headed, change how you talk. Just change how you talk. Your words are going to bring you either into a safe harbor or they’re going to end you

on the reef or ruin. And it's not only your own life that's directed by your tongue. Tongues direct churches. Tongues direct nations. Tongues control crowds. Think of the power of speech. Study the history of the world and you'll find out that great movements had begun with people speaking.

Think of this church. Do you know what this church is a tribute to? It is a tribute to the preaching of the Word of God that began, primarily, but not altogether, with a man named R. G. Lee, a mighty master with words, and he laid a foundation. Not him alone, but others, laid a foundation for this church. Think of the power of his words.

Think of the power of the words of Adolf Hitler. Think what Adolf Hitler did with words. And we still watch those old newsreels and watch that man, demon-inspired, but with his words he moved people.

Words give direction. Words bring destruction. Look in verses 5 and 6 of this same chapter. "Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" In Australia there are fires that are raging, infernos, out of control 1.2 million acres, the last report I heard. A place has burned in Australia and is burning now as big as the state of Rhode Island—hundreds and hundreds of miles of destruction. And did you know that that much fire, it is possible to start it with one match? One match! It only takes a spark to get a fire going. "Behold, what a, a great matter a little fire kindleth!" Your tongue gives direction. Your tongue can bring destruction.

Oh, some people have a tongue like an arsonist. These are primarily gossips. Their tongue is a torch. Put this verse down, Proverbs 16, 27–28: "An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire." That's an ungodly man. I have thought about it when I prepared this message, and I decided, and I think it is true, that gossip is worse than vulgarity. Someone wrote these words: I am more deadly than the screaming shell from the howitzer. I win without killing. I tear down homes, break hearts, and wreck lives. I travel on the wings of the wind. No innocence is strong enough to intimidate me; no purity pure enough to daunt me. I have no regard for truth, no respect for justice, no mercy for the defenseless. My victims are as numerous as the sand of the sea and often as innocent. I never forget and seldom forgive. My name is gossip. My name is gossip. Look in verse 6, if you will. "And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature..."—look at the word course of nature. What he's talking about there is a chain reaction. That's what gossip does. It, it sets on fire the course of nature—"...and it is set on fire of hell." Your words can set a fire that sets a fire that sets a fire that sets a fire that sets a fire.

Zig Ziglar, who has spoken in this pulpit, said something I thought was quite humorous. He told a story like this: He told of Mr. Sparks who is a business executive

who'd been to the club to work out. And on his way back to the office he was arrested for speeding and given a ticket. It irritated him. So when he got back to the office, he's still irritated and he calls in the sales manager and reads the sales manager the riot act. Now the sales manager now is steamed, and so he goes to the secretary and barks at his secretary and says, "Did you finish those letters I gave you to finish, and why aren't they done? I want them done." Well, now the secretary is angry, and she goes to the receptionist and says, "Look at all this work I have to do, and you sit here and file your nails. You don't have anything to do. Why don't you help me to type these letters anyway? You just sit there and try to look pretty." And this really irritated the receptionist. And on her way home, when she got home, walked in the house. There was her 12-year old son watching television, and he had a little hole in his pants. She was so angry she said, "Look at that. You've torn your pants. You go upstairs. No television. No dinner for you." The poor, little kid didn't know exactly what had happened. But as he was going upstairs, the cat made a mistake and walked in front of him. And so he kicked the cat and said, "You get out of the way." Then Zig Ziglar asked this: wouldn't it have been better if Mr. Sparks had gone directly from the health club to the switchboard operator's house and kicked the cat himself? Now I used this illustration one other time and a woman wrote me a scathing letter and told me, "You should never encourage people to kick cats." She missed the point of the whole thing. Everybody, don't kick cats, okay. What I'm trying to say is let's keep the cats from getting kicked, and the way to do it is to control our tongues.

Have you ever, have you ever been talking to someone and they would say something like this: "I said, and then she said, and then I said, and then she said, and then I said, and then all hell broke loose." That's exactly what he's talking about here. It is set on fire of hell.

Our tongues give direction. Our tongues bring destruction. Our tongues can cause death. Look, if you will, as we continue to read here. "The tongue can no man tame—verse 8—it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." The apostle Paul, speaking of our sinful nature, says in Romans 3:13, "Their throat is an open grave; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps—that is, poison serpents—is under their lips." The word that James uses here for deadly poison means snake venom. Proverbs 18:21: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat, love life shall eat the fruit thereof." Death and life are in the power of the tongue. Not necessarily physical death, though that may be true too, but there are those who dip their tongues in the slime of the sewer and assassinate somebody's character. Did you know that you are never more like the devil than when you are slandering somebody's character? Did you know that one of the names for Satan is slanderer? That's what the very word devil means is slanderer.

Dr. A. B. Simpson, the great leader in the Christian and Missionary Alliance, said this: “I had rather play with forked lightening or take into my hand living wires with their fiery currents than to recklessly speak a word against any servant of Christ or idly repeat the slanderous darts which thousands of Christians are hurling on others.” Be very, very careful that you never slander an individual and, especially, a servant of God.

II. The Defiant Stubbornness of Our Words

Now, what we talk about here, first of all, is the dangerous significance of the tongue. Direction, destruction, and death are in the tongue. And here’s something else I want you to notice. Not only the, the dangerous significance, but I want you to notice the defiant stubbornness of our words. Look, if you will, in verses 8 and 9: “But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.” What’s he saying about the tongue? He’s saying, first of all, the tongue is incorrigible. You can’t tame it. You don’t have what it takes to control your speech. It is an unruly evil. And, the word unruly means that it may break out at any time. You never know what’s going to pop out of your mouth if you’re walking in the flesh.

Not only is your tongue incorrigible, but your tongue is so inconsistent. Look in verses 9 and following: “Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?” That is, pure water and salt water. How inconsistent are our tongues. Have you ever—now don’t answer this out loud. Maybe your children could answer for you, and I hope they won’t. But have you ever been to church on Sunday morning and sung praises when Jim Whitmire or Jamie were leading, and then got in an argument on the way home from church and began to curse those that you love? I don’t mean profanity. The word curse here does not mean to use profanity. It means to put down. It means to belittle. It means to speak hurtfully. It means to deal harmfully with somebody’s self-esteem. On the same day that we’ve come to church to bless God, we argue and fuss and fume. What he’s talking about here is, our tongues and how uncontrollable they how, how defiantly stubborn our tongues are.

III. The Deeper Source of Our Words

But now here’s a third thing I want you to notice. I want you to notice not only the defiant stubbornness, but the deeper source of our words. Why do we do this? Well, look again in verses 11 and 12: “Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? Either a vine, figs? So can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.” Now, what James is saying is this: If

you want to know what's wrong with your words, consider your source. And what he is saying is, if the water is bitter, it's because the spring is bitter. If the fruit is bad, it's because the tree is bad. Have you ever said some things, some awful things, some terrible things, and then said, "I don't know what got into me? I don't know what put that into me. That's just not like me." Every one of us have tried to excuse ourselves by saying, "You know, that's just not like me." But you know what James would say? James would say, "Yes, it is. Yes, it is." It's impossible. If it came out of you, it's because it was in you. It was like you. It came out of you. He's saying, "As the well is, so is the water. As the tree is, so is the fruit." And we might as well admit the deeper source of our words because the Bible says, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." They say in the country, "What's down in the well comes up in the bucket." Now Jesus said in Matthew 12:33: "Either make the tree good and its fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt and its fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by its fruit." You can tell what's in the heart by the way people speak. Harsh words show an angry heart—negative words, a negative heart; someone always talking, an unsettled heart; boastful words, an insecure heart; filthy words, a dirty heart; critical words, a bitter heart; encouraging words, a happy heart; gentle words, a loving heart; truthful words, an honest heart. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." And so, it's primarily a matter of our heart.

Look, if you will, in verse 14: "But if you have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth." What is he saying? He's just simply saying you are telling a lie, if you say the problem is not your heart. If you've got this envy and strive, it shows in your speech, but it comes from your heart.

IV. The Dynamic Strength of Our Words

Now here's a fourth and final thing I want to say. I want to talk to you about the dynamic strength of your words. Look, if you will, in verse 13: "Who is a wise man and endowed with knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom." And look in verse 17: "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace." Now, he's talking here about the dynamic strength of your words. Did you know that your words can justify you or condemn you—that you are justified by your words or condemned by your words? You say, "I don't believe it." All right, let me give you some Scripture.

Matthew 12:36–37—Jesus said, "But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak shall they give account thereof in the day of judgment." Did you know what the word idle means? It means non-productive, just like an idle worker. Every word that

you speak that is non-productive you'll answer for. "Every idle word that men shall speak shall they give account thereof in the day of judgment." And then our Lord said, "For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Jesus said that. Your words will justify you or condemn you.

Here's a verse that we use often in bringing souls to Christ, Romans 10:8-9: "But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Now he's saying here that it's your confession that brings possession. How does that work?

Have you ever tried to bring a person to Jesus Christ and, perhaps, lead them through the sinner's prayer? And then to check them out to see if they're truly saved, you say something like this: "Did you ask Jesus Christ to come into your heart and save you?" "Yes, I did." "Well, do you believe He did it?" "Well, I'm not sure. I don't know whether He did or not. I just don't feel saved. I don't guess I am." "Well, let me ask you a question: Is He? I'd say He's not." Then you ask somebody else to pray that prayer. Dear God, I'm a sinner. I'm lost. I need to be saved. You promised to save me. You died to save me if I trust you. I do trust You right now with all of my heart. Come into my heart, forgive my sin, and save me. "Did you pray that prayer?" "Yes." "Did you mean it?" "Yes." "Are you saved?" "Yes." "Well, how do you know you're saved?" "Because He said if I'd trust Him, He'd save me, and I've trusted Him and I'm saved." Is he saved? Yes. You see, by his words he's condemned or by his words he's justified. If you say you're not, God says you're right. If you say you are, God says you're right. I mean, because when you say that you are, that's the sign that you're trusting. I don't mean just simply repeating words. I mean, say it and mean it. Say it and mean it. Your words will justify you or condemn you. "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Your words bring a bad or a good confession.

I want you to mark this verse in your Bible, Hebrews 3:1. Listen to this: "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Jesus Christ." Now what is a high priest? A high priest is someone who takes an offering and gives it to the Father. The priest is the mediator. Now Jesus is our high priest. But what does Jesus offer to the Father? Jesus is the high priest of our profession. Jesus has to offer to the Father what we profess. Have you ever thought about it? You see, when you make a good profession, a good confession, then Jesus has a good confession to offer to the Father. We tend to have what we say. When we confess Jesus, Jesus confesses us. He's the high priest of our confession. Listen to Matthew 10:32-33: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven." Do you see how it works? He's the

high priest of our profession. We confess Him. He says, "All right, I'll take that and profess it to the Father." "But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father..." He has a denial to offer to the Father. And how does this work? By what we say. There's a very real sense in which we have what we say when we say with faith what we mean. When you say, "I can," you probably can. When you say, "I can't," you probably can't. You're probably right both times.

Words are powerful things. You need to learn how to speak words of victory, words of praise, words of strength. And don't let the devil pick up on your words and use your words. Give Jesus good words. He is the Apostle and High Priest of our profession. Our words will bless or curse.

Look, if you will, in chapter 3 of James here, and verse 8: "But the tongue is an unruly evil no man can tame, the, but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude, or similitude of God." You can bless people with your tongue or you can curse people with your tongue.

If you'll read the Old Testament, you'll read that the patriarchs, the father rulers of the Old Testament, would speak a blessing to their children. In our church, we have begun at weddings and, and staff meetings and, and fellowships to speak blessing. A blessing is not a prayer as much as it is a pronouncement, a prophecy, a blessing, saying good things to an individual, for an individual, about an individual, unto an individual. It is a blessing.

I was in a store the other day, and I saw a man with a little boy who looked like he was about seven. This man was a bully of a man. And he was saying terrible things to that boy. He was saying to that boy, "You are stupid. You are dumb. You'll never do anything right." I cannot tell you how horrible that man was. Now I'm going to make a confession. I wanted to go over and give him a knuckle sandwich; I mean, I really did. I was so steamed at him. It was all I could do to control my tongue, listening to that man speak to that child. And I thought, what a curse that man is putting on that man. I assume that the child was, that man's son. But we can bless with our words or we can curse with our tongues. I wonder what kind of a blessing or what kind of a curse are you bringing on your loved ones. Oh, there is the dynamic power of words.

All right now, having said all of this, how can the tongue be tamed? Well, James says that you can't do it. No man can tame his tongue. No man can manage his mouth. Now these words come out of the heart, so it's very obvious that you've got to get a new heart. Look in verse 14: "But if you have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth."

Now, if these things are coming out of your heart, it's either because you've never been saved or after having been saved, you've allowed Satan to come back and take

up residence in your heart. And so you've got to begin with the heart. You've got to have a time of confession before God to get your heart absolutely clean and pure. You cannot control your tongue without changing your heart, according to verses 14 and 15. These things come out of the heart. And you'll never purify the water by painting the pump. You have to change the wellspring of your life. And so if you're not saved and you're having difficulty with your words—and, remember, your words are going to control your life, they're going to justify you or condemn you—then get Jesus Christ in your heart. And if you are saved and you've allowed this filth to seep back into your heart, ask God to cleanse you and forgive you.

Next, it is vital, if you would control your words, that you have a quiet time before the Lord. Look, if you will, in verses 16 and 17: “For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.” Wisdom from above. Well, how do you get this wisdom from above? You wait before God with a clean heart.

Put in your margin Psalm 141:1–3. Listen to this: “LORD, I cry unto thee: make haste unto me; give ear unto my voice when I cry unto thee. Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense...”—now, what he's talking about is worship. Your prayer just goes up to God like sweet-smelling perfume—“...and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.” Your prayer is like a bloody sacrifice. Your prayer is like sweet incense. It comes to the throne of God. And then he says in verse 3: “Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.” It couldn't be more clear. When you get your heart right and then wait before God, God will give you the mind of Christ, and He will give you the tongue of the learned. When you're jostled, whatever you're full of is going to spill out of you. And if you're full of Jesus, and the Word of God, and the wisdom of God, that's going to spill out of you.

Thirdly, ask God to give you discipline with your words. Turn to James 1 and look in verse 19. “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” God gave you two ears and one mouth. Swift to hear, slow to speak. We would all be so much better off if we would listen more and speak less. And if we would do that, we would see less anger and wrath in our homes and in our businesses. What we need to do is to tune in and tone down and sweeten up. That's what he's saying in verse 19, “let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath.”

Conclusion

Maybe some of us need to go home tonight and get our children, and say to our children, “We've been wrong in our house. We've been using words that we ought not to

use. We've been yelling and screaming. And mother's been wrong, or daddy's been wrong. And, children, it's because our hearts have been wrong. The reason we've spoken that way is because we haven't had a pure heart before God, and we want you to forgive us. We're going to make a fresh start in our home. We're not going to have these kind of words in our home." Maybe you need to go to your wife or your husband and confess the sharpness of your tongue. Maybe there's somebody that you've gossiped against. Maybe there's some slander that you've spread and you need to go and ask that individual for forgiveness, and say, "By the grace of God, I'll make it right wherever I can. I'm so sorry." And may we get our hearts so right and pure with God that what comes out of our mouth is what's in our heart, and Jesus will be in our heart. That every morning we'll have that quiet time; that we'll load up on the Word of God, and then we'll listen a whole lot more and speak, perhaps, a whole lot less.

Father, seal the message to our hearts, and help us, Lord, that we might learn to control our tongues by the grace of God, because that's the only way it can be done. In Jesus' wonderful name. Amen.

Wisdom, Wise or Otherwise

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: July 30, 1978

Main Scripture Text: James 3:13–18

“Who is a wise man and endowed with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.”

JAMES 3:13

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Conclusion

Introduction

Would you take your Bibles please, and turn tonight in the book of James, chapter 3? James continues to speak to us. James, what a great man he was. Let us hear his words of wisdom for those of us tonight, as we think on the subject of wisdom, and try to determine whether or not you are wise or otherwise. James chapter 3 and verse 13: *“Who is a wise man and endowed with knowledge among you?”* (James 3:13). You can almost hear James, as he’s standing in the assembly and saying, “Say, I want to ask a

question. How many of you are wise?” And, some of the teachers there would sit up straight because he’s talking to teachers. They would sit up straight, and with a smirk on their face, they’d lift their hands, and as if to say, “Well, I’m pretty wise.” And, then James would say, “All right, show me, just how wise you are.” For James didn’t want a say-so salvation or a say-so wisdom, James wanted a know-so and a show-so salvation, and a know-so and a show-so wisdom.

And, so James goes here to delineate and speak about wisdom. He says, *“Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation”—*that word conversation means behavior—*“his works with meekness of wisdom But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace”* (James 3:13–18).

I. The Value of Wisdom

Three things we’ll notice tonight in this little study. First of all, I want you to see the value of wisdom. Then I want you to see the virtues of wisdom. And, then I want you to see the victory of wisdom.

First of all: the value of wisdom. Now, James places a great value upon wisdom. James doesn’t say who is a rich man among you, or who is an educated man among you, or who is a popular among you, or who is a busy or ambitious man among you. But, James, looking for a leader in the church says, “Who is a wise man among you.” And, James like all of the writers of the Bible, puts a great, great, premium upon wisdom. Wisdom is greater, ladies and gentlemen, than monetary power.

Let’s just leave the book of James for a moment, and go to the book of wisdom, the book of Proverbs. And, let’s see what Proverbs has to say about wisdom. Proverbs, chapter 3, for a moment. Just lick your fingers and go there with me, will you? All right, Proverbs chapter 3 and let’s begin reading in verse 14. Well, let’s get verse 13: *“Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her”—*that is unto wisdom—*“Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace”* (Proverbs 3:13–17). Now, James is saying—excuse me, Solomon is saying here that wisdom is greater than riches, and wisdom power is greater than monetary power.

I was interested to note in the newspaper today that they moved several billion dollars from one bank to another, seven point five billion dollars. And, when they did, according to this newspaper article, they had 100, an army of 100 policeman, and guards, and all of these with their machine guns, and their tear gas, and all forms, all manner of electronic communications, to move 7.5 billion dollars from one point to another because, of course, everybody wants money, don't they? I wonder if they had a truckload of wisdom going down the street. How many policeman they would have had to guard it. I wonder how many people would have said, "That's what I need, that's what I want more than silver, more than gold, more than rubies, I want wisdom."

It'll be a great day in your life when you begin to seek after wisdom as you seek after money. That's what the writer of the book of Proverbs is saying, "That wisdom is greater than monetary power," and then the Bible teaches that wisdom is greater than military power.

Look in Ecclesiastes chapter 9. You're in Proverbs, just turn right and go just a little further and, if you will, look in chapter 9 verse 16: "*Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength*"—I wonder how many people believe that—"*nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard*"—Hmm—"*The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war...*"—I wonder if you believe that, that wisdom is greater than strength?—"*Wisdom is better than weapons of war*" (Ecclesiastes 9:16–18).

Do you know what we need in the Pentagon? We need some wise men. That's what we need in the Pentagon. Do you know what we need in Washington, without my calling any names? We need some wise men. Some men who walk in the ways of the Lord. Some men who get on their knees, and their face before Almighty God, and pray to God.

Solomon was a great king, and the Lord came to Solomon and God said to Solomon, "I'll give you anything that you want, anything that you ask for." And, turn to 2 Chronicles, chapter 1, if you will, and look in verses 10 and 13, and see what Solomon asked of the Lord, that pleased the Lord and honored the Lord so much. In 2 Chronicles chapter 1, verses 9 and 10, or 10 and following. Solomon said, "*Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this thy people, that is so great? And God said to Solomon, Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king: Wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like*" (2 Chronicles 1:10–12).

Oh, would to God that our leaders in our nation's capital could say, "O God, give to me wisdom. I'm not able; we're not able to lead this great nation unless we have wisdom that is from above." "Stand beside her, and guide her, through the night with the light from above" (Irving Berlin). I'm so afraid that our President has surrounded himself with many people who are smart, but not wise. We need to pray for Mr. Carter, who says that he's a Christian. I love him, he's my president, and I pray for him. But, oh, we need to pray that God will bring into his company, and that God will surround him with people who have honor, and dignity, and strength, and people who are wise and seek the face of the Lord, and the will of God, and the wisdom of God that is revealed in this book.

The Bible says that wisdom is greater than monetary power. Wisdom is greater than military power. Wisdom is greater than mental power. Look in Proverbs chapter 4, and look in verse 4: *"He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live. Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her"* (Proverbs 4:4–8). Notice especially verse 7: "Wisdom is the principal thing..."

Now, he says with all your getting, get understanding too, get knowledge too, but above all, get wisdom. It is so important. Wisdom is the most important thing that a leader can have, that a teacher can have.

Now, notice in these scriptures that I have given you, that the Bible links wisdom and knowledge together. Go back to James, the third chapter, and we'll see it also there in James the third chapter. Notice what James says: *"Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you?"* (James 3:13). Wisdom and knowledge are always linked together, but get this, and understand it, wisdom always comes first, and knowledge without wisdom is a dangerous thing. You see, if a man has knowledge without wisdom, he may be proud that he knows so much. Wisdom is humble that it knows so little. And, knowledge always fails if it is not linked to wisdom. You see, wisdom gives you the ability to apply the knowledge that you have.

Einstein had knowledge. But, it grieves me to say that I do not believe that Einstein had wisdom. You say, "How do you know what Einstein had?" Because Einstein never confessed Jesus Christ as his personal Savior, and Jesus is the heartbeat of wisdom. Einstein confessed, before he died in 1955, that there were so many things in his mind that he could not unlock, so many things that he didn't understand. And, Einstein said, and I quote, "I feel like a man who is chained. If I could only be freed from the shackles of my intellectual smallness, then I could understand the universe in which I live." He'd

never understand this universe until he knows the Lord, 'til he knows the Lord Jesus Christ.

I don't care if you're an Einstein. I don't care if you're an intellectual genius. I want to tell you the Bible says, "*God hath hidden these things from the wise and the prudent and hath revealed them unto babes*" (Matthew 11:25). Talking about this world's wisdom, talking about the people, the intellectual people of this world. God reveals the simple things, the wonderful things, to those who know Him, and to those who love Him. And, the Bible describes that so carefully and poignantly in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verses 18 through 25, but I'll not read those verses now, just jot them down in the margin and read them when you get home.

Now, God links wisdom and knowledge, but he always puts wisdom first and knowledge follows hard on the heels of wisdom. Because, you see, a wise man will get knowledge. A wise man will study. I'm not trying to tell you that if you have wisdom, that you don't need to study, that you don't need to learn. The Bible says the contrary, that we're to: "*Study to show ourselves approved unto God...workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*" (2 Timothy 2:15). And, a lump in your throat is no excuse for a vacuum in your head.

A little boy in school one time was asked what a vacuum was. He said, "Let me think." He said, "Well," he said, "I can't exactly say, but I've got it up here." Now, there are a lot of people, I think, who are very similar to that little boy. They are saved but they don't have understanding, they don't have knowledge. They may have a modicum of wisdom, but if they were truly wise, they would do what Peter says in 1 Peter chapter 1, verse 13: "*gird up the loins of your mind...*" (1 Peter 1:13). Now, back when Peter wrote this men wore long flowing tunics. And, if a man wanted to run, he had to reach down and take this tunic—this long, flowing skirt—and just kind of pull it up, and tuck it under his belt so he could run. Now, what Peter is saying is, "Gird up the loins of your mind." Take those long, flowing robes of indiscipline, and laziness, and carelessness and run for all your worth, and apply your mind, and love God with all of your mind.

Now, notice especially, James is talking to teachers, and the whole chapter is really to teachers. And, you Sunday School teachers, listen. Chapter 3, verse 1: "*My brethren, be not many teachers, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation*" (James 3:1). Don't you just sally forth to teach a Sunday School class unless you're willing to be right with God, unless you're willing to study The Word of God. You ought to resign and get out of your class, for you're cumbering the ground, you're a disgrace to God and man.

So, James says, "You be careful for your Sunday School teacher," or any kind of a teacher, any person who assumes to be a spiritual authority. He had better watch his words, and he had better be wise, and he had better have knowledge. He had better

learn to study.

I remember reading, or hearing, long ago about a country school teacher who was applying for a job to teach in a country school house, and the board of education was giving this country school teacher a test. And, one of the questions on this test was this: “Can you teach what you do not know?” I think her answer was classic. She said, “You can no more teach that which you do not know than you can come from where you ain’t been.” But, I’m afraid that we have teachers today who are trying to teach what they don’t know.

Now, listen, wisdom and knowledge are always linked together. Study—you preacher boys, you seminary students, don’t you fall into this trap, this vicious trap, that you say, “Oh, well, I’ll just get up and depend upon the inspiration of the moment, and God’ll just put into my heart what He wants me to say.” That’s a cop out. That’s laziness.

One man told the professor in his theological school that’s what he was going to do. He said he had no need to study, he was going to trust the Lord, and when he got up God would show him what to say. The professor said, “Very well, I have a preaching appointment for you the next day.” And the boy said, “Well, where is it?” He said, “I want you to go down to thus and such a corner, and there I want you to preach.” He said, “Well, that’s in the Mexican section of this city. The people down there just speak Spanish.” “Well,” he said, “that makes no difference if God’s going to put it in your heart, he might as well put Spanish in your heart as any other language.” Amen? Oh, listen, dear friend, study to show yourselves approved unto God.

One great preacher, who had studied hard and applied himself, and had labored over The Word of God, was up to preach when an ignorant person, who had never studied, took him by the coat-tail and in a snide way said, “Don’t you think God could do without your education?” And, this great and gracious minister, who had applied himself to The Word of God, turned around and said, “Yes, I’m quite certain God could do without my education. Don’t you think God could do without your ignorance?” Let me tell you something ladies and gentlemen. There is no excuse for some in this congregation to be as spiritually ignorant as they are.

Now, what is the difference between wisdom and knowledge? Knowledge is learned but wisdom is given. Do you understand that? Knowledge is learned, but wisdom is given. *You get knowledge by looking around, you get wisdom by looking up.* You get knowledge by studying, but you get wisdom by prayer and meditation. That’s the reason the Bible says, in James chapter 1, verse 5: “*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him*” (James 1:5). Wisdom is given. But, don’t any of you kids go to your examination in school and sit down, and when you’ve not studied say, “O God, give me knowledge.” He

ain't going to do it. And, if it's an English test, He isn't going to do it. He's not going to do it. But, you can say, "O God, give me wisdom." And, God will give you wisdom. God will show you how to apply your heart unto wisdom.

You see, the Bible never tells us to pray for knowledge. The Bible tells us to study for knowledge, but the Bible tells us to ask for wisdom. And, the difference between wisdom and knowledge is this, that wisdom is given, knowledge is acquired through study.

And, oh how we need to get wisdom. Wisdom commences that conversion. You see, the Bible says, in Psalm 111, verse 10, that "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom...*" (Psalm 111:10). Until you come to an honest, reverential fear of God, you don't even have a modicum of wisdom, not even a modicum of wisdom. And, then the Bible says in 1 Corinthians, chapter 1, verse 30: "*the Lord Jesus Christ has made into us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption*" (1 Corinthians 1:30). Christ is our wisdom. Wisdom commences at conversion and wisdom deepens through discipleship. But wisdom is given and knowledge is learned.

And so James spends some time just talking to us about the value of wisdom. It's more important for you to have wisdom than it is for you to have a good paying job. It's more important than it is for you to have strength in your body. It's more important than for you to have the doors of your house locked tonight when you go to sleep, that you have wisdom.

II. The Virtue of Wisdom

Now, secondly, notice not only the value of wisdom, but notice the virtue of wisdom. James, here, begins to describe wisdom because James wants to get it out of the ethereal—and out of the abstract—and into the concrete.

I heard about a man who talked about the fact—how much he loved children, until one day he was pouring a new driveway and some kids came and wrote in the wet cement. And, he was furious. And, somebody said, "I thought you loved children." He said, "Well, I love them in the abstract, but I don't love them in the concrete."

Now, there are a lot of people who love wisdom in the abstract, but James wants to get it right down into the life, and so he gives the virtues of wisdom beginning now in verse 13: "*Who is a wise man and endowed with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation*"—and that word means behavior—"his works with meekness of wisdom" (James 3:16).

A. Two Virtues of Wisdom

1. Wisdom is Good

Now, there are two virtues of wisdom. It is good, and it is gentle. That's what James

says. First of all it is good—out of a good behavior. You see, if you have wisdom—real wisdom—it will show in your life in practical goodness. You’ll be like the Lord Jesus who went about doing good. And, it’s not so much a matter of your mind—how clever you are—it’s a matter of your life—how good you are. James is not interested in your words. James is interested in your works, and so James says, “If you have wisdom, then you show it first of all, by a good life.” It is good.

2. Wisdom is Gentle

And, then he says, “You show it by a gentle life.” It is gentle. Look again in verse 13: “...with meekness of wisdom” (James 3:13). That means with a gentle spirit.

Now, if you have arrogant wisdom, and call it true wisdom, the wisdom that you have is as phony as a three-dollar bill. The Lord came to make you a wise man, not a wise guy. And, there are a lot of people who don’t have meekness.

Now, this word *meekness* is a very interesting word, and it literally comes from the word that means *level*—mecca—and when a man is meek, that doesn’t mean he’s going around looking, thinking lowly of himself all of the time, that isn’t what it means. What some people call meekness, I just call poor posture. Meekness is an ability, a sweet evenness about life. When a man is meek, he doesn’t have to look up to anybody because he knows he—by the grace of God—has been made a royal blueblood. But, he doesn’t have to look down on anybody. And, when a man is meek he can look everybody straight in the eye. He doesn’t have to look down upon the poor, or look up to the rich. He doesn’t have to look down upon the ignorant. He doesn’t have to look up to the educated. He is a man that is a gentle man. True wisdom is both good and gentle.

Now, James, in order to make his point—contrast the virtues of true wisdom with the vices of devilish wisdom, so let’s go on. We’re still under the heading the virtues of wisdom, but James being the good teacher that he is always gives us a negative lesson. And, so he describes the virtues of wisdom positively in verse 13, and then negatively in verses 14 and 15: “*But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish*” (James 3:14–15).

B. Three Things About Devilish Wisdom

1. The Revelation of it

Now, James speaks of devilish wisdom, as over against divine wisdom, so you can understand what divine wisdom is. And, he says three things about this devilish wisdom. First of all, he speaks of the revelation of it. You want to know whether you have it or not? He says that it is revealed by bitter envying and strife in your hearts.

Now, this word “bitter envying and strife” literally means *jealously* and *selfish ambition*. That’s what the word strife means, selfish ambition. James is saying, “If you

have jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, then you're not wise." Is there someone you're envious of? Someone you're jealous of? Somebody that you wish to get ahead of? Then you're not a wise man. That's what James says.

Now, this is the revelation of it. And, evidently there were those in the church who were fighting to be first. There were those who were trying to be the headmaster of the church that James is speaking to. And, they were getting into fights and wrangling, and many of these teachers were boasting about their wisdom. Hmm.

Sam Jones used to say, "When dogs fight over bones it's a sign that bones are scarce." And, when men fight over religion it's a sign of the same thing. Now, religion is scarce, and when you find people who have bitter envying and strife in their hearts, I don't care how much of a Bible they claim to know, they're not wise.

2. The Roots of it

And, so James speaks of the revelation of it. Jealousy and selfish ambition, then he speaks of the roots of it. And, he says this wisdom doesn't come from above.

a. It is Earthly

Notice verse 15: "*This wisdom descendeth not from above, but*"—first of all, it—"*is earthly...*" (James 3:15). Now, there are a lot of people—some of them worm their way into churches, and are leaders in the church, but they want to run the church like they would run the business corporation. God deliver us from having those kind of men on our finance committee, those kind of people on our committees, those kind of people on our church staff, or in our deacons.

You know, some churches get a man, he's a business executive over here, or he's a financier over here, or he's this over here, and they say that's a very smart man. Look how shrewdly he's run his business. We need him in our church. Well, my dear friend, if he's not filled with heavenly wisdom, he'll wreck and ruin any church that he tries to lead. There is a worldly wisdom—an earthly wisdom—and this church, or any church, cannot be run on those principles.

First of all, he's earthly, I'm not saying that we ought not to have good business in our church administration, we ought. But, oh, our values and the way that we look at things are so vastly different—they are heavenly and not earthly. But, how many people have wrecked and ruined churches with earthly wisdom.

b. It is Sensual

And, so James, as he speaks of the roots of it, says first of all that it's earthly, and then he says it is sensual. Look again in chapter 15, or chapter 3 and verse 15: "*This wisdom descendeth not from above but it is earthly and sensual*" (James 3:15).

Now, this word *sensual* literally is a word that means *soulish* or *natural*. First Corinthians chapter 2, verse 14 uses the word this way, "*But the natural man...*"—the sensual man, the soulish man, it's all the same word—"*...not the things of the Spirit of*

God... neither can he know them..." (1 Corinthians 2:14). Jude spoke of men who are sensual as *"having not the Spirit"* (Jude 1:19), in Jude chapter 19. He's not talking about a person who is sensuous. He's not talking about a person who is erotic or sexy. That's not what he's talking about. He's talking about a person who is sensual—that is a person who lives by the senses, by his natural instincts—and he thinks that his common sense is God-given wisdom. He doesn't know the difference.

Let me tell you how a soulish man thinks—how a sensual man thinks. The soul is made up of mind, emotion, and will and here's how that man thinks. His mind says, "I think I ought to do such and such a thing." His emotion says, "I feel like doing it." His will says, "I'll do it." And, that's the way he does it. He operates that way.

c. It is Devilish

James speaks of the roots of this devilish wisdom as coming first of all from the earth, it is earthy, or earthly. Secondly, as coming from the soul, it is sensual. And thirdly as coming from the devil, it is devilish, it is demonic. It comes from the devil himself. I believe that the devil attends many church business meetings, and there's some man there in tune with the devil. And, when the church is discussing something, the devil leans over and whispers in that man's ear and says, "I'll tell you something I think would be pretty smart for this church to do." And, the man stands up and says, "I move we do thus and such a thing." And, the wisdom that he has may be very cunning, but it is devilish.

Now, notice James is warning church people—he's not talking to those outside the church—and he says, *"This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish"* (James 3:15). What he's talking about is the world, the flesh, and the devil. Did you notice that? That's where he says this wisdom comes from. You'd be surprised how much of this kind of wisdom is paraded in the average church, the average committee, the average business meeting, as people are trying to carry on the work of Almighty God.

I was reading a news article that I clipped out of one of our state papers, and it tells about a minister who dressed up as the devil, went to church, and caused an uproar. This was in Erwin, North Carolina. His name—maybe some of you know this man—Floyd Turlington, pastor of Porter's Chapel Church in Erwin. Anybody here from Irwin? You know Mr. Turlington? Well, he thought it would be a good idea—maybe a little reverse psychology—he put on a devil's suit and went to church on Sunday morning. Got him a pitchfork and a placard, and marched up and down the front of the church and said, "Don't attend this church"—trying a little reverse psychology.

But this article goes on to say that when people came by they didn't know what was happening. And, they saw it, they got alarmed, little children started to cry, adults got nervous, someone called the police, the sheriff came out there and arrested the

minister. That's what the article says. They have a law in North Carolina that if you're over 16, you can't go around with a mask on. You know, the Ku Klux Klan and other things, and that's what the laws against. And, they arrested this man, and when they took the mask off, the minister was underneath.

Well, let me tell you something that frightens me more than a minister wearing a devil's suit, and it's a devil wearing a minister's suit. And, you know that happens more times than people realize. The Bible says that, *"It is no wonder, for Satan himself is transformed as an angel of light"* (2 Corinthians 11:14). But, he does a better job of camouflaging himself, and it is amazing how many times Mr. Satan himself comes to church, and speaks in church, and this wisdom descendeth not from above but is earthly, sensual and devilish.

3. The Results of it

Now, James speaks of the revelation of it. Strife and bitter envying, he speaks of the roots of it, and then he speaks of the results of it. I want you to go on and notice here in verse 16: *"For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work"* (James 3:16). Have you ever been in a church where things were just confusion, where there's no peace, no joy, no happiness, no victory, no hallelujahs, no souls getting saved, just confusion. It is because people have tried to do the work of God in the energy of the flesh, and they have used earthly, devilish, sensual wisdom rather than divine wisdom.

And, so James very practically speaks to us of the value of wisdom, then he speaks to us of the virtues of wisdom. And, he is saying real wisdom, godly wisdom, wisdom that is from above, is good and it is gentle. And, whatever you claim to have, if it doesn't make you good, and if it doesn't make you gentle, you haven't got Godly wisdom.

III. The Victory of Wisdom

Now, the third thing I want you to notice is the victory of this wisdom, and true wisdom. Look here in verse 17: *"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace"* (James 3:17–18). Here's the victory of wisdom.

A. It Overcomes Sin

There's six things that this wisdom overcomes. First of all, it overcomes sin. It overcomes sin. Look again in this verse, *"the wisdom that is from above is first pure..."* (James 3:17). Ha, you see if you've got this wisdom in your life it's going to deal with sin. It's going to show you that sin is stupid, and you're going to want to be pure in the sight of a righteous and Holy God. Impurity is not wise.

B. It Overcomes Strife

But, not only does it overcome sin, it overcomes strife. Look again in this verse. It says, “*the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable...*” (James 3:17)—peaceable. You know, I know some folks who claim to be wise—and they even claim to be wise with the Bible—but they use the Bible as a club rather than a sword. And, their olive branch is launched from a catapult. They are censorious, cantankerous, vituperative, they live to fight—well, they fight to live—and they’re always claiming to be defenders of the faith.

I want a church that is unapologetically fundamental and conservative, but I don’t want a fighting mean, nasty spirit in our church. Wisdom, wisdom is peaceable, peaceable. And, God help us that even when we deal with someone that we disagree with, that we might remember that if he’s an unsaved man, that we’re arguing with a lost man, and who ought to scold a blind man for not being able to see. If he’s a saved man, we need to remember that he’s our brother. And, that one day we’ll spend eternity with him. And, we wound him, we wound ourselves.

And, the third thing we need to remember is that when we’re in controversy with anybody, the unsaved world is listening. Somebody said, “Never argue with a fool. Those standing around might not be able to tell who’s who.”

C. It Overcomes Stubbornness

All right now, listen, this wisdom is peaceable. It overcomes sin, it overcomes strife, it overcomes stubbornness. Go on to look. It says here it is “*...gentle, and easy to be intreated...*” (James 3:17). When a man is wise he has convictions, but his convictions are about The Word of God. But, he’s not rigid and inflexible about many things that really don’t matter.

Do you know what the word *gentle* means? It’s a combination of two words which mean *into* and *fitting*, and you put it together and it means the ability to fit into, to adapt, to be gentle, in things that don’t really make a difference. Let me give you an illustration of that.

One time Abraham Lincoln was sitting at dinner with some very elegant people, but there was one man there who was not so elegant, and didn’t have such good manners. And, that man took his coffee, blew on it, poured the coffee into the saucer and drank out of the saucer. Of course, some of the ladies at the table were aghast, but when Lincoln saw what happened he took his coffee, poured it into the saucer, and for the rest of the evening he also drank his coffee out of the saucer. Now, that to me was a gentle man. There was a man who knew how to adapt. There was a man who was willing to fit into a situation.

D. **It Overcomes Selfishness**

You see, wisdom overcomes sin, wisdom overcomes strife, wisdom overcomes stubbornness. Wisdom overcomes selfishness. Go on and look as we think about the victory of wisdom. It says here that it is “*full of mercy and good fruits...*” (James 3:17). That is, real wisdom is not always thinking of itself, it’s thinking of others. It is merciful to other people. There is no life so empty as a self-centered life, and there is no life so centered as a self-emptied life. Is your life empty, or is it centered on the Lord Jesus Christ?

E. **It Overcomes Snobbishness**

True wisdom overcomes selfishness, and then wisdom overcomes snobbishness. Look again in verse 17: “*...without partiality...*” (James 3:17). Now, you remember what partiality is? James has already told us about partiality. You remember the strange case of the highfalutin usher that we talked about a while back, where we looked down on some people, and pay special deference to other people. Real wisdom doesn’t do that.

F. **It Overcomes Shame**

When a man is really wise, he can look through the façade and see that every man is someone for whom Jesus died. A wise person is that way. And, so wisdom overcomes sin. It overcomes strife. It overcomes stubbornness. It overcomes selfishness. It overcomes snobbishness. And, then finally it overcomes shame. The last thing in verse 17: “*...and without hypocrisy*” (James 3:17).

Conclusion

Oh, how James hates hypocrisy. People who say, but they don’t show. And, James says, “You show me your faith without your works, you hypocrite, and I’ll show you my faith by my works. You show me your wisdom by your words, I’ll show you my wisdom by my life.” And, what is the result of the victory of wisdom? Well, it’s peace, when there’s a victory, there’s peace. Look in verse 18. “*And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace*” (James 3:18). A wise man is a peacemaker. The war is over and wisdom has won the peace. Let’s bow together in prayer.

When God Says No

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: February 21, 1999

Main Scripture Text: James 4:1–4

*“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your
lusts.”*

JAMES 4:3

Outline

Introduction

- I. Pray in His Name
- II. Pray in the Spirit
- III. Pray in the Will of God
- IV. Pray in Obedience
- V. Pray in Fellowship
- VI. Pray in Faith

Conclusion

Introduction

Be finding the book of James—it's back toward the back of the New Testament—and turn to chapter 4; and, when you've found it, look up here. And I remind you of what you ought to already know: that prayer is the Christian's greatest privilege, and alas—alas—it is so often our greatest failure. Now, there's no substitute for prayer. You can substitute many things, but there's no substitute for prayer—not energy, not enthusiasm, not intellect, not intent. There is no substitute for prayer. We need to learn how to pray.

James talks to us today about some prayer problems. Look, if you will, in chapter 4: "From whence come wars and fightings among you?" Now, let me just stop right here before we read the rest of this, and say that there are two major problems that James mentions in these few verses that we're going to read, the first four verses—two major problems concerning prayer—more than that, but two major ones—and I want you to see if you can spot them while I read: "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence even of your lusts that war in your members. Ye lust and have not; ye kill and desire to have, and cannot obtain; ye fight and war; yet ye have not, because you ask not. Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be the friend of the

world is the enemy of God."

Now, what are the two great problems that James mentions in that passage of Scripture? First of all, there is the problem of unasked prayer. Sometimes we just don't pray. "Ye have not,"—why?—"because ye ask not." God wants to load you with benefits; God wants to bless you. God has invited you, "Call upon me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things that you know not," but James says, you don't have because you don't ask. So there is the problem of unoffered prayer.

But there's another problem here, and that's the problem of unanswered prayer. It is that people ask, but he says, "Ye ask and receive not." So, which is the greater problem? Well, either one of them causes our prayers not to be answered. You see, God responds to our prayers in about four basic ways, and all of this is by way of introduction. Sometimes the answer to prayer may be direct—God just says yes. We ask God for something, and God just says, All right, my child, you ask, here it is; and God gives us exactly, precisely, immediately what we ask. I love to pray that way; I love just to say, Lord, I need so and so, and He says, All right, here it is, my child. And I think we've all—if we've walked with the Lord for many days—we've seen that kind of an answer to prayer, I mean beyond coincidence, beyond any happenstance. We say, Yes, this has the hallmark of God; this has the stamp of God upon it. So, first of all, the answer may be direct, and God says, yes.

Sometimes, the answer may be different, and God says, better. Now, if God doesn't give you what you ask, He may give you something far better than you ask. And so, the answer may not be direct; it may be different. You ask one thing, and God gives you something else. For the Bible says, "We know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us." And so, sometimes, the Holy Spirit says, Adrian is asking this, Father, but this is what he needs; and give him not what he asks, but give him something better than he asks. "And he is able to do exceedingly above all that we can ask or think"—that's what the Bible says.

And so, thank God, sometimes, that the answer is direct; sometimes the answer is different; and then, sometimes the answer is delayed— isn't that true? I mean, the Bible says, "Therefore will the Lord wait that he may be gracious unto you." The Bible says, "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you"—that's in Matthew 7, I believe, but the Greek verb is, keep on asking, keep on knocking, keep on seeking, keep on keeping on, because the Bible says, "Therefore will the Lord wait that he may be gracious unto you." With God—with God—the timing is more important than time, and so, the Bible says, "You have need of patience that you may be perfect." That doesn't mean, without any flaw; it means mature. And so, if you want to be mature, sometimes God makes you wait. It's like sometime a child waiting for Christmas, and then Christmas may be all the better.

All right now, sometimes the answer is direct—God says yes. Sometimes the answer is different, and God says, Better. Sometimes the answer is delayed, and God says, Wait. But sometimes the answer is no—the prayer is denied. It's not direct, it is not different, it is not delayed; it is denied. God says no. "We ask and receive not"—that's what James says.

Now, why would God say no to prayer? Well, that's what we want to think about today, and what I have to say to you is not necessarily new. I'm not going to say anything that I've not said from this pulpit before at one time or another. I'm not here to create truth; I'm here to reinforce truth, and to remind us of things that I need to be reminded of, and you need to be reminded of, on and on and on.

Sometimes, prayers are not answered. Well, if we pray, and the prayer is not answered, would we say that the promises of God are wrong? Would we say that God is not a prayer-answering God? Well, I want to ask you a question. If you went into your house this afternoon and turned the light switch and the lights did not come on, would you say electricity has failed? Would you say that Thomas Edison is a fraud, or would you say there must be some problem? Sweetheart, did we pay the bill? Go out and check the fuse box, see what has happened. You would not say that electricity has failed; you would say there is something wrong, because we have turned the light switch, and the lights did not come on.

Now, we need to ask ourselves this question: When we pray sometimes, and the answer is not direct, it is not different, it is not delayed; it is denied—then why does God say no? I want you to get some paper and jot some scriptures down, because I'm going to give you a lot of Scripture this morning, and you won't even have time to turn to them—you're just going to have to trust me, and you can turn to them, if you're fast. If you're a little boy or girl, you can probably find them. If you're an adult, you'd just better write them down. Let me just turn the thing around and say, not only why God does not answer our prayers, but let's say why God does answer our prayers, and then we'll see why perhaps He didn't answer our prayers. Let me give you about six principles.

I. Pray in His Name

Principle number one: We are to pray in His name—we are to pray in His name. Now, put these scriptures down—John chapter 14 and verse 6—we all know that one. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me." Now, when you're coming to God in prayer, you have to come through the Lord Jesus Christ. And then, in John 14, John 14, verses 13 and 14, here's what Jesus said: "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do." "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son"—if ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.

And then, put down John chapter 16, verses 23 and 24: "In that day you shall ask me nothing. Verily, I shall say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Hitherto, if you have asked nothing in my name, ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." Show me somebody getting his prayers answered, and I'll show you a joyful Christian.

You see, without Jesus, there is no way to the Father. And so, if you were to say you were lost in a neighborhood, and you stop, and you ask an individual, you're walking around there, and you say, Can you tell me how to get to thus and such a spot? That individual says to you, Well, it's quite complicated. I'll try to explain it to you, but you don't have any way to get there. You say, I'll walk. He says, It's too far. He says, I'll tell you what I'll do. You get in my car, and I'll take you there. Now, he's not just pointing to the way; he then becomes the way. Jesus doesn't just point us to the way; Jesus is the way. He says, You can't come unless I take you to the Father. Now, therefore, to pray in Jesus' name means that you have received Him as your Lord, and as your Savior, and as your Master.

Let me give you just three A's as to what it means to pray in Jesus' name. Number one: it means to pray with His approval. You can't sign His name to something that He doesn't approve. You can't just rattle off a list of things that you want, and say, In Jesus' name, some little pet phrase to get your prayers answered. You're to pray—in His name means with His approval. And then, it means to pray for His acclaim, for His glory; not for your glory, but for His glory. And then, it means to pray with His authority. You have signed His name to your prayer, and you can say, Satan, in the name of Jesus, leave me alone. You can pray with His authority, because, when you pray in His name, do you know what you're saying? I am His agent—I am His agent. I am here on earth, acting on behalf of Jesus Christ in heaven, and I am praying with the power of attorney; I am praying with the authority of Jesus Christ. I'm signing His name to this prayer. And, friend, you can't do that, if you're not a child of God. Don't forge His name to an unauthorized prayer.

II. Pray in the Spirit

All right, number one: we must pray in His name. Number two: we are to pray in the Spirit. We're to pray in the Spirit. Now, it's not enough to be saved so you can pray in His name; you must also be surrendered so you can pray in the Spirit. Now, there are many commands in the Bible to pray in the Spirit. Let me give you two of them. Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 18: "Praying always, with all prayer and supplication, in the Spirit." And then, in Jude verse 20: "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost." Now, when the Bible says Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost, that's the same thing. When we talk about a ghost, we're not talking about some

specter. It means a spirit, an invisible spirit. So we're to pray in the Spirit, the Holy Spirit.

Now, why must you pray in the Spirit? Well, obviously, because of your human weakness. Put this verse down—Romans 8, verse 26: "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered." Now, the word helpeth is a Greek word which means to take hold of. You're trying to put a bale of cotton on a truck; you're on one side, you're trying to put it on the truck, somebody on the other side is helping—together you take hold of.

Now, this word is a compound word; it has a prefix which means together with, and instead of—it's a double prefix. It's a very wonderful word. He helps us, and He does it instead of us, and He does it together with us. Now, what does that mean? Well, it means, when we pray, He is the one who guides, energizes, inspires our prayers; He is the one who puts power in our prayer; He does it instead of us, but He does it together with us. What does that mean, in plain English? We can't do it without Him, and He won't do it without us.

We are to pray in the Spirit. We pray to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit. And you see, the Spirit, He's the one who energizes our prayer; He's the one who instructs our prayer. The Bible says, "We know not what we should pray for as we ought." There are so many things to pray for and so many ways to pray for those things. So the Holy Spirit of God is sort of the divine transformer. He takes our prayer energy and He transforms it so it is acceptable to God the Father. We are praying in the Spirit.

The Bible says He does that with groanings that can't be uttered. There are things that we cannot articulate. The word groanings is a word that is used for a woman in labor, when she's about to bring forth a child; and the Holy Spirit of God is there when we pray, this almost wordless praying. He is there to energize our prayer, to make our prayer acceptable into heaven. Because of our human weakness, He helps our infirmities. Because of our human ignorance, we know not what we should pray for, as we ought. The dear, blessed Holy Spirit of God is the one who energizes our prayers. He inspires our prayers. He guides our prayers. He energizes our praying. He sustains our praying.

So, if you want your prayers answered, you know what my suggestion to you is? Number one, you get saved. Number two, you be surrendered, and you say, Here, dear Holy Spirit of God, you are the Spirit of grace; you are the Spirit of supplications; pray in me, through me, with me. Guide, energize, my prayers.

III. Pray in the Will of God

Number three: we are to pray in the will of God—we are to pray in the will of God. Now, when you're saved, and when you're Spirit-filled, then you're going to be praying in

the will of God. First John chapter 5 and verse 14: "And this is the confidence that we have in him: If we ask him anything according to his will, he heareth us." You see, when we pray in the Spirit, we'll be praying in the will of God, because the Holy Spirit of God is not going to guide you to pray for anything that is not the will of God. And if you pray for something in the Spirit that is not the will of God, the Holy Spirit says, This is what he's asking, but this is what he needs. So it's very important—these things track one upon another.

Now, do you want the will of God in your life? If you don't want the will of God in your life, why should you pray? Prayer is not some exercise where you bend God's will to fit your will; prayer is finding the will of God and getting in on it. Let me ask you a question: Do you want your prayers answered? Yes, sir, Pastor, I want my prayers answered. Second question: are you willing to do the will of God? You say, Well, I think so—what is it? No, you're not willing—you're not willing. You don't say, Lord, show me, and I'll make up my mind. You say, Lord, I have signed the contract at the bottom; you fill it in—you fill it in. I want your will. Any time, any place, anywhere, any cost, I want your will. When you want His will that way, you'll know His will. "And this is the confidence that we have in him: that if we ask him anything according to his will, he hears us." Well, you say, What if He wants me to do something I don't want to do? Do you think God's going to trap you? Do you think God is not a good God?

Listen—Romans chapter 12, verses 1 and 2: "I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God"—the God who died for you—"by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, and be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you might prove what is that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God." I don't know what God's will is for you, but I know three things about it: it's good, it's acceptable, and it's perfect.

God wants for you what you'd want for yourself, if you had enough sense to want it. I'm telling you, don't ever say, oh, I have to do the will of God. You can say, Bless God, I get to do the will of the one who loves me so much that He died for me. I've learned a lesson about prayer. The prayer that gets to heaven is the prayer that starts in heaven. What we do is just close the circle.

You see, it is the will of God. Prayer is not some method by which man on earth gets his will done in heaven; prayer is the method where God in heaven gets His will done on earth. And Jesus taught us to pray: Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth—thy will on earth—as it is in heaven. You know what prayer is? Prayer is the Holy Spirit finding a desire in the heart of the Father, then putting that desire into our heart, because we're praying in the Spirit, and then sending it back to heaven in the power of the cross, because we're praying in Jesus' name. We're praying in the will of God. Prayer is the Holy Spirit finding a desire in the heart of the Father, putting that desire

into our hearts, because we are in the Spirit, and then sending it back to heaven in the power of the cross, because we're saved, and under the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, we are to pray in the will of God.

Now, that's the reason so many of our prayers are not answered. James tells us clearly that we have not because we're praying out of the will of God. Look at this: "From whence come"—chapter 4, verse 1—"From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence even of your lusts"—the word lusts here means strong desire—"that war in your members?" He's talking about your eyes, your hands, your feet, your heart. "Ye lust and have not, ye kill and desire to have, and cannot obtain. Yet ye have not, because ye ask not; and ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss." That is, you're asking with the wrong intent.

You say, Well, Pastor, can't I ask God for what I need? Of course! You can ask God for personal needs, but you cannot ask God for selfish needs. You know, some people take a verse like this one—Psalm 37 and verse 4—it says, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he'll give you the desires of your heart." You say, oh, man, that's wonderful. I've always wanted Reagan's ranch in California. I'm going to buy it. I'll just have the desire of my heart. No. Listen what God is saying: "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he'll give you the desire of your heart." Do you know what determines your desires? Your delights. You desire what you delight in. Now, he doesn't say, if you delight in the things of this world, God will give them to you. No, you delight yourself in the Lord, and you will have the desire of your heart.

You know, sometimes people think, well, the promises of God have failed, and the promises of God have not failed. These people are just selfish in their prayers. For example, I quoted Matthew 7:7, where Jesus said, "Ask and it shall be given you; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you," and a person says, Well, I've asked—I didn't get; I sought—I didn't get; I knocked—it wasn't opened unto me. Well, listen. A text without a context is a pretext. That's Matthew 7:7. Just go back to Matthew chapter 6 and verse 33, where Jesus said, "Seek ye first—first—the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you."

We come with a laundry list, a shopping list, of things we want—da da da da da da da da. Over here—have we sought first the kingdom of God and His righteousness? And are we delighting in the Lord? No, absolutely not. We have the lust of our flesh, our carnal desires; we think of God as some sort of a glorified bellhop, to give us whatever our carnal natures want, and then we wonder why our prayers are not answered. No, friend, we are to pray in the will of God.

There are several instances in the Bible where people came to Jesus when He was here on earth, and they asked Him for things, and the answer was no. Put these down in your margin—Luke 12, verses 13 through 15: "And one of the company said unto

him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." Now, evidently the father had died, and they were trying to adjudicate the will, and one brother was not dividing with the other brother. "And he said unto him,"—Jesus said to him—"Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said unto him, Take heed, and beware of covetousness, for man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Here was a man who came to Jesus with a prayer. He said, Jesus, you step in; you judge this matter. I want you to be the executor of this estate. Jesus said, That's not my job. Who made me a judge or a divider among you? Then Jesus said, You've got a covetous spirit. A lot of times we pray with a covetous spirit, and we wonder why our prayers are not answered.

Let me give you another example of the same thing. Here's another prayer that was asked of Jesus—Matthew chapter 20, verses 20 and 22: "Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshiping him." Now, who were the sons of Zebedee? James and John. "And he said unto her, worshiping him and desiring a certain thing of him"—in other words, she's praying. "And he said unto her, What want thou?" What do you want? "She saith unto them, Grant that these, my two sons, might sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left, in thy kingdom."

Now, here, she's saying, Lord, look. I've got two fine boys here, and I know you're the Messiah. I know you're going to rule, and, in a place of authority, I'd like James over here on your right hand, and I'd like John over here on your left hand. That'd be all right, Lord? Here's what the Lord said to her—listen to this: "Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of and to be baptized of the baptism that I am baptized with? They saith unto him, Yes, we're able." They didn't have a clue, did not have a clue. Here was a woman who was praying to the Lord, but she was not praying in the will of God.

IV. Pray in Obedience

We're to pray in the name. We're to pray in the Spirit. We're to pray in the will of God. And then, next, we are to pray in obedience. This is very important. Not only are we to pray in the will of God, but we're to pray in obedience. That is, it is absolutely, totally foolish to pray, a waste of time to pray, if we have unconfessed sin in our hearts and in our lives. So many times our prayers are, God, I know I'm not right, but just bless me anyhow. Did you know that if God were to just bless you anyhow, what He would be doing is reinforcing your sin nature? He would be reinforcing, He would be enabling, you as a sinner. Now, you ought to know better than that.

Let me give you some people in the Bible who knew better than that. Jot these scriptures down. King David knew better than that, because he said, in Psalm 66 and verse 18, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Now, he didn't say,

If I have sinned, the Lord will not hear me; but he says—let my Bible just represent sin, it tells about sin; and let's just say I have a little pet sin down here in my heart—kiss kiss, nice fellow there, pat, pat—Now, Lord—kiss kiss. Now, Lord, here's what I want you to do for me... Isn't that ridiculous? Is that not ridiculous—to regard iniquity in our heart, and then have the audacity to come to God, while we fling our sin in His face, and ask Him to answer prayer?

Isaiah knew better than this. Listen to Isaiah chapter 1, verse 15: "And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil." We can pray for God's blessing on America, and keep killing babies, friend, and our prayers are not going to be answered. He says, your hands are full of blood. Isaiah picks up this theme back now in the last part of Isaiah—Isaiah chapter 59, verses 1 through 4: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not short, that it cannot save, neither is his ear heavy that he cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. Your hands are defiled with blood, your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness; none calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth. They trust in vanity and speak lies; they conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity." That, my friend, is modern America, and we wonder why God is not hearing our prayer for America. Now, God will let us have the kind of national leadership we want, but God will not necessarily answer our prayers, if we choose leadership that is corrupt over a God who is holy.

First Samuel chapter 8 and verse 18—God says, "And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye have chosen you, and the Lord will not hear you in that day." You'll cry out because of your king that you've chosen you, but I won't hear you. I'm telling you, friend, when we pray in disobedience, when we live lies, nationally or personally, and expect God to just overrule and override, He will not.

Ezra knew better—Ezra chapter 9 and verse 6—and he says, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face unto thee, my God, for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens." Ezra said, O God, I can't even look you in the face because of the sin of this nation.

James knew that we must pray in obedience. James said, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

The apostle John knew better. First John chapter 3 and verse 22: "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him because we keep his commandments and do those things which are pleasing in his sight." What are all of these things saying to us? What is David saying? What is Isaiah saying? What is James saying? What is John saying? What is

the Bible saying over and over again? We must pray in obedience. You want your prayers answered—get your heart clean before God.

Ancient Israel was in trouble; the armies of Israel had been defeated. Joshua, the commander-in-chief, was on his face, and he's praying, and God says to Joshua, "Why liest thou upon thy face? Get thee up. Israel hath sinned." That is, Josh, you deal with the sin in the camp, if you want me to hear your prayers.

Now, folks, it's clear, it's plain: we must pray in obedience. Not only sometimes the sin of commission, but the sins of omission. Sometimes we think that we're all right, because we're not lying, stealing, cheating, committing adultery. You know what the great sin is in America today? We've failed to help the poor and the needy. Did you know that? We stuff ourselves full of bread, and giggle about being overweight, but people are walking the streets of our cities who have need.

Proverbs 21, verse 13: "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself but will not be heard." It's not talking here about committing adultery; he's just talking about a hard heart. You know, our Lord says, in Luke chapter 6 and verse 38, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; what measure you mete will be measured to you again." You know, one of the favorite verses people like to quote, Philippians 4 verse 19, "My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory," now, that is a truth, but it's like the other truth that I was talking about over there in Matthew 7:7; it comes in a context. Paul talked to these people at Philippi, and he says, "My God will supply all of your need." That's in chapter 4, verse 19, but in chapter 4, verse 16, he says, "For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity." What's he saying? He's saying, I was here, a missionary, and what did you do over and over and over again? You met my need. And he said, I'll tell you something else: and God's going to supply your need. Many times we think, you know, I can just get it all for myself, and I don't want to be pouring out God's blessing. I don't want to be a conduit; I just want to be a reservoir. And I just want to—quote—put it on my refrigerator: my God shall supply all of my need. My God is not going to supply any of your need, dear friend, if you're selfish—if you're selfish. We have to pray in obedience.

Again, I want to tell you, prayer is not just some way that God is going to bless you as His little darling, when you can live a life of selfishness, and lust, and desire to have, and fight, and war. One reason you have not is you ask not. Another reason you have not is because you ask, and you ask, and you receive not, is because you ask amiss. Many of us, you know, we have about all God can trust us with financially. Let me tell you something: God says, give, and it shall be given to you. You shovel out, and God shovels in. But God's got a much bigger shovel than you have. Listen. We need to pray in obedience.

V. Pray in Fellowship

Now, here's the fifth thing: We're to pray in fellowship—we're to pray in fellowship. Now, what does that mean? It means that if you have a grudge in your heart toward somebody else, don't expect God to hear your prayers. Mark 11, verses 25 and 26: "And when you stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any, that your Father which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye forgive not, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses." That's plain. If your heart is headquarters for hate, if you're harboring grudges, don't expect God to hear your prayer.

And let me ask a question: Is that grudge that you have in your heart—is it worth not having your prayers answered? A little girl was mad at her mother. Her mother put her to bed, and said, Now, say your prayers. The little girl prayed and prayed for her father, prayed for her brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles and all of her cousins, and then looked at her mother, and said, I guess you noticed you weren't in it. I doubt that little prayer was heard that night.

Sometimes the grudge is between husband and wife. Listen to this verse, married people—1 Peter 3, verse 7: "Likewise, ye husbands dwell with them,"—that is, your wives—"according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife as unto the weaker vessel, as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered." You fight like cats and dogs in the house, you're not getting along domestically, you're not praying in fellowship—your prayer is hindered.

VI. Pray in Faith

Now, I want to mention the last thing here. We're just saying, Why does God say no? Why does God say no? Last of all, we must pray in faith—we must pray in faith. We're to pray in faith. Matthew chapter 21 and verse 22: "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." Hebrews 11 and verse 6: "For without faith it is impossible to please him, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of those that diligently seek him." Pray and believe, and you'll receive. Pray in doubt, you'll do without. You cannot please God without faith.

George Mueller, a man of another generation, was a man greatly used of God in answered prayer. As a matter of fact, he kept a prayer journal, and he had 25,000—25,000—recorded answers to specific prayer. Somebody asked George Mueller, what is the secret of your answered prayer? You know what he said? Have faith in God—have faith in God. Simple answer. Now, I don't think he said, Have FAITH in God; I think he said, Have faith in GOD. The emphasis was not so much upon his faith as it was the God that made his faith the great faith that it is.

Now, what is faith? Faith is not working yourself up into a frenzy; faith is not positive

thinking; faith is not saying, I'll name it and claim it; faith is not wishing to make it so; faith is hearing from God, believing in God, and acting on what you hear, and believe, and laying hold of that—praying in faith. Now, you say, Pastor, how can I have this faith? Let me tell you something. I've mentioned six things, and if you'll do the first five, you'll find faith will be automatic. You will find faith will be automatic. You give your heart to Jesus Christ, you'll be filled with the Spirit of God. You begin to pray in obedience, and all of these other things, and you're going to find out that it's so much easier to pray, and believe, and receive from God what you need and what you want.

Conclusion

Now, beloved friend, listen to me. It all begins with praying in the name of Jesus. Jesus said, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name. Ask and ye shall receive." You begin by praying in the name of Jesus, and you cannot—listen to me; don't put up your stuff; I'm not finished yet just because I came down here; listen—you can't pray in the name of Jesus, if you haven't received Him into your heart as your Lord and Savior. That's hypocrisy—that's hypocrisy. Have you given your heart to Jesus? I mean, are you saved? I didn't ask if you were a Baptist, or a Methodist, Presbyterian, or Episcopalian, Roman Catholic. Are you saved? I didn't ask if you were religious. I didn't ask if you were moral. I'm asking, Are you saved? Jesus will save you this morning, and He will save you this moment, if you'll trust Him.

So bow your heads in prayer. Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. If you're already saved, would you begin to pray for those round about you who may not be saved? Let me pray for you today, if you're not a Christian. You say, Well, Pastor, I'm a Christian. I mean, I believe in Jesus. Yes, but I'm talking about the person who's been born again. If you haven't been born again, if you're not truly a child of God—I'm not asking if you're religious—if you're not truly saved, let me just pray for you right now. Father God, I pray in the name of Jesus that your Spirit will move in this place today. O Holy Spirit, that you will open hearts, Lord, that you would grant faith, that you would draw men, women, boys and girls to Jesus Christ.

While heads are bowed and eyes are closed, why don't you pray this way? Lord Jesus, I need you. I'm a sinner and my sin deserves judgment, but I need you and I want you. You promised to save me, if I would trust you. Thank you for paying for my sin with your blood on the cross. I believe that you are the Son of God. I believe that you were raised from the dead, and I receive you now, today, right this moment, right now, as my Lord and Savior. I turn from my sin to you, Lord Jesus, and I trust you to save me. Begin now to make me what you want me to be, and help me never to be ashamed of you. In your name I pray. Amen.

The Principles of Prayer

By Adrian Rogers

Sermon Date: May 15, 1983

Main Scripture Text: James 4:1–10

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Unmasked Prayer of a Struggling Man
- II. The Unanswered Prayer of a Selfish Man
- III. The Unhindered Prayer of a Spiritual Man
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 - B. There Must Be a Submission to the Father
 - C. There Must Be a Standing Against the Devil
 - D. There Must Be a Separation from the World
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Conclusion

Introduction

Today, we're going to be talking about the principles of prayer, because, friend, there are principles that are real and valid. God does not work in prayer according to whim, fancy, or caprice. But there are definite laws, and rules, and principles for getting our prayers answered. And the time will come, if it has not already come, when for God to answer your prayer will mean more to you than anything in this world. So pay attention.

Now James is talking, here, about prayer. James chapter 4—and we're going to begin reading in verse 1, and we're going to read right on through to verse 10. Now James asked the question: *"From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?"* That is, if people can't get along with other people, it's because they can't get along with themselves. If they fight outwardly, it's because they're fighting inwardly. *"Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not..."*—now, if there's not a star in your Bible right by that statement, there ought to be—*"ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye might consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?"*—and that word *enmity* means "warfare with God"—*"whosoever therefore will be the friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to*

envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (James 4:1–10).

Now James, here, is intensely practical. And James is not a theoretician. He’s not a philosopher. He is a very practical preacher, and he’s talking to us about a very needful matter, and that is the matter of prayer. And there are three things that stand out to me in these 10 verses, as I look at them.

I. The Unasked Prayer of a Struggling Man

The very first of which is the unasked prayer—the unasked prayer of a struggling man. James pictures a man who is struggling to get what he needs, but he fails to ask God. Look at it, and see if that’s not what he’s saying in verses 1 and 2: *“From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not”* (James 4:1–2). Lusting, scheming, warring, fighting, killing, trying to get what we need, when all the time the Father says: *“Ask, and ye shall receive”* (John 16:24).

God wants to answer the prayers of His. And very plainly, many who are in this building, and many who may be listening to a later tape, and many who are listening by radio or television, have needs that are unmet, simply because you’ve not come to God, who invites you to come and ask God. Our wonderful God has put it: *“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you”* (Matthew 7:7). This is God’s plan. And God doesn’t want you to try to do it yourself. You must ask God.

A little boy was trying to move a huge stone. His father was amused, and watched him. And his father said to him, “Son, are you using all of your strength?” He said, “Yes, Daddy, I’m using all of my strength.” And the dad said, “No, you’re not, Son. You’re not using all of your strength, because you haven’t asked me to help you.”

So many times you’re saying, “Oh, I’m trying with all of my strength.” My precious friend, God is your strength. Have you asked Him? Have you said, “Father, I want You to help me to do this?” Are you going to quit trying, and start trusting, and come to the Lord?

Did you know, friend, that not only are you missing a blessing when you don’t pray, but you’re sinning against God? You see, prayerlessness is more than weakness; it is

wickedness. Let me give you some verses. In 1 Samuel chapter 12 and verse 23—listen to this verse: *“God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you”* (1 Samuel 12:23)— *“God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you.”* Did you know, my friend, that, when God the Holy Spirit gives you a prayer assignment to pray for me, or God gives me one to pray for you, and I don’t do it, not only do I fail you, I sin against God? Listen to it again: *“God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you.”* You see, prayer is a command of God.

First Thessalonians chapter 5, verse 17, says we are to *“pray without ceasing”* (1 Thessalonians 5:17). That is, constantly, continuously, we’re to be praying. If you’re not praying, you’re transgressing that command. Luke chapter 18, verse 1, says this: *“And He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint”* (Luke 18:1). The word *faint* means “to get weary and stop praying.” *“Men ought always to pray.”* Now if men ought always to pray, and they don’t pray, they’re sinning. If God has commanded us to pray without ceasing, and we don’t, we sin. *“God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you.”*

Do you know what John Bunyan said in *Pilgrim’s Progress*—he said this: “Prayer will make a man cease from sin, but sin will make a man cease from prayer.” You see, there’s not a sin in my life but what prayerlessness is a part of it. There’s no vile or hideous sin in my life, or in your life, or in anybody’s life that proper prayer would not have prevented. Jesus Christ told His disciples: *“Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation”* (Mark 14:38). And the reason that we enter into temptation so easily and the reason that we become the dirty plaything of a dirtier devil is that we have failed to pray and put on the whole armor of God. Prayerlessness is a sin! You have not because you ask not. God forbid that we should struggle and try to do it ourselves! And so what you see here is the unasked prayer of a struggling man.

II. The Unanswered Prayer of a Selfish Man

But move on. Then, you see the unanswered prayer of a selfish man. Now there are some people who don’t pray. But then, there are other people who pray, but their prayers get no higher than the light bulbs. Their prayers are not answered. Continue to read. *“Ye ask...”*—verse 3—*“Ye ask, and receive not...”*—not every prayer is answered. Some prayers, indeed, are not answered and never will be—*“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss,”*—that is, you’re asking for the wrong thing and with the wrong motive—*“that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?”*—I’ve already told you that word means “warfare with God”—*“whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God”* (James 4:3–4).

Can you imagine—the enemy of God? Do you think the enemies of God are going to get their prayers answered? How are we the enemies of God? When we become a friend with the world. Well, what’s so wrong with being a friend to the world? Now when we say *the world*, we’re not talking about unsaved people, nor are we talking about the world of nature. When the Bible uses the word *world*, here, it means “an ungodly system that is set against our Lord and His Christ.”

Now notice what James says that friendship with the world is. It is *adultery*. It is adultery. You see, Jesus Christ is the Heavenly Bridegroom. The Church is the bride. We are married to Jesus Christ. And because we’re married to Him, we’re to be true to Him and pure before Him. This world is like a harlot that would steal away our love from the Lord Jesus Christ. And when we flirt with the world, when we run with the world, when the ambitions, ideals, and desires of the world find a lodging place in our hearts, we set ourselves at warfare with God. Friendship with the world is enmity with God.

Now suppose there’s a worldly Christian, a Christian who has un-confessed, un-repent-ed-of sin in his life, and he loves this world; and then, he comes to God, and he asks God to bless him and strengthen him. Do you think God’s going to do it? He cannot! Suppose there’s a woman who’s being unfaithful to her husband; and then, she comes to her husband, and he’s aware that she’s being unfaithful to him. And she says, “Husband, I want the keys to the car, and I’d like for you to give me several hundred dollars.” He says, “What do you want it for?” “Well, my boyfriend and I are going to take a trip to New Orleans, and I’d like for you, if you would, to subsidize it.” Would he be a wise husband if he did it? What he would be doing would be just simply encouraging, aiding, and abetting that adultery!

Now don’t you see that, when a worldly Christian comes to God and says, “God, give me strength,” why should God give a worldly Christian strength? Why should God give you more strength to serve the devil? Some of you are sick, and you say, “God, heal me.” Well, why should God heal you, if you don’t intend to use that strength to serve Him with it? Why should God just give you more strength, more ability, to serve the devil and to be unfaithful to Him?

Why, not only is God not going to hear; God is going to oppose you. You and God get into a war. “Know ye not that friendship with the world is warfare with God?” You see, dear friend, there are prayers that are unasked, but there are also prayers that are unanswered. There is the unasked prayer of a struggling man. But there is the unanswered prayer of a selfish man—a man whose motives are not pure, who wants God to answer prayer that he might consume it upon his lusts. So many people think of God as some sort of a glorified bellhop, a Santa Claus, who’s supposed to give them everything they want, simply because they ask for it; and yet, they do not love Him with

all of their hearts. They're committing spiritual adultery.

III. The Unhindered Prayer of a Spiritual Man

But now, let's move on to the third thing. Now there is the unasked prayer of a struggling person who struggles rather than asks. There is the unanswered prayer of a selfish person. But I want you to see the unhindered prayer of a spiritual man—the unhindered prayer of a spiritual man. Your prayers ought not to be hindered. It ought to be normal for God to answer your prayer. Sometimes, someone will say, “Hey, believe it or not, God answered my prayer,” like that was unusual. Friend, it ought to be the unusual thing if your prayers are not being answered. It ought to be the normal everyday occurrence for God to answer your prayer.

Now as I told you by way of introduction, God works according to principle. He doesn't work arbitrarily, capriciously, by whim or fancy. There are rules for prayer, just like anything else. And if your prayers are not being answered, it's because somewhere, somehow, you're transgressing God's principles. I want to give you five principles, now, of prayer. And James gives them right here—to get your prayers answered. And they come—one, two, three, four, five—right as we go right down the Scripture. So just stay right in the Word of God, and let's see what they are.

A. There Must Be a Sensitivity to the Holy Spirit

The very first principle is there must be a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. Now look in verse 5: “*Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?*” (James 4:5). Do you think God was just spinning His wheels and wasting time when He had that put in the Bible? Do you think the Scripture said that for no purpose at all—that “*The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?*” (James 4:5).

Now who is the Spirit that dwells in us? The Spirit that dwells in us is the Holy Spirit. “*If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*” (Romans 8:9). Now that phrase “lusteth to envy” may confuse you if you read it in the King James. The word *lust* does not mean “sexual desire.” It just simply means “a strong desire.” Let me give it to you in another translation; perhaps it will be clearer: “The spirit which God made to dwell in us jealously yearns for the entire devotion of the heart.” He “jealously yearns for the entire devotion of the heart”—that's what it means: “He lusts to envy.” He desires with all of His desire that your full heart be given to Jesus Christ. He has every right to say that your full heart's devotion belongs to Christ. You are not to be a friend to this world. You are not to commit spiritual adultery. The Holy Spirit that is in you is put in you to cause you to love Jesus Christ passionately. And God didn't say that in vain; God said it with a purpose. “The Spirit which [He] made to dwell in us jealously yearns for the

full devotion of the heart.”

Now have you allowed the Holy Spirit to cause you to be deeply in love with Jesus Christ? You see, when the Holy Spirit of God brings your full heart’s devotion to Jesus Christ, when you yield to the Spirit in such a way that you don’t quench the Spirit, then, sirs—then, ladies; then, boys and girls—you’re praying in the Spirit. You see, Paul said, in Ephesians 6:18—listen—we are to be *“praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.”* In the Spirit! In the Spirit! You see, what is *praying in the Spirit*? *Praying in the Spirit* is letting the Holy Spirit of God dictate our prayers, letting the Holy Spirit of God lead our prayers, letting the Holy Spirit of God direct our prayers, letting the Holy Spirit energize our prayers, and letting the Holy Spirit of God move us to pray! You see, *we pray in the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father.* And the very first principle of prayer is there must be a submission to the Spirit. And He makes prayer not a duty, but a delight.

Do you ever find it difficult to pray? You just have to drag yourself to the place of prayer, force yourself to the place of prayer? Do you know why? It’s because you’re being ruled by the flesh. Do you think the flesh likes to pray? Indeed not! The flesh is at enmity—warfare with God. The flesh is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. Remember what Jesus said to those drowsy disciples? *“The spirit...is willing, but”—* what?—*“the flesh is weak”* (Matthew 26:41). The flesh doesn’t want to pray. And so if you are a carnal Christian, a fleshly Christian, you’re going to find prayer a drudgery. If you’re a spiritual Christian, you’re going to find prayer a delight, if the Holy Spirit in you is free.

Now if, dear friend, you find it difficult to pray, it is because you’re not filled with the Spirit. And if you’re not filled with the Spirit, it is because you have not surrendered completely to the Holy Spirit and to the Lordship of Christ. And if you’ve not done that, it is because there’s un-confessed, un-repent-ed-of sin in your heart and in your life. You have become enamored with this world. You have become a spiritual adulterer. You are making love with this vile world that nailed Jesus to the cross. You have set yourself as an enemy of the cross of Christ. Your prayers are not going to be answered. There must be a sensitivity to the Spirit of God, who jealously yearns for your full heart’s devotion to be given to Jesus Christ. Is Jesus Christ Lord of your life? Do you love Him with your full heart’s devotion, as the Holy Spirit of God is telling you to love the Lord Jesus Christ?

B. There Must Be a Submission to the Father

Let me give you a second principle: Not only must there be a sensitivity to the Spirit, but, when there is a sensitivity to the Spirit, there’s going to be a submission to the Father. Continue to read. That was verse 5; now, look in verse 6, if you will: *“But he*

giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God" (James 4:6–7). No longer be proud, like that man who fights, and wars, and schemes, and desires to have and cannot obtain. He tries to do it himself. Come to God and say, "God, I can't do it. Lord, I cast myself upon You. I'm unable to do it by myself. Here, Lord, I humble myself before You. And Lord, I want Your will to be done. I submit to You." Answered prayer *is not for* rebels, nor is prayer some way that you bend God's will to fit your will, nor is prayer some exercise where you talk God into doing something that He ordinarily would not want to do. Prayer is just simply submitting to the will of God.

This world got into a problem to begin with when, in the Garden of Eden, that first man, Adam, said: "Not Thy will, but mine be done." The second Adam, the Lord Jesus, in another garden said: "*Not my will, but thine, be done*" (Luke 22:42). And He is the example for us all. Jesus taught us, if we would get our prayers answered, we're to pray, "*Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done*" (Matthew 6:9–10). Are you willing to pray that way? "This is the confidence that we have in Him: If we ask Him anything according to His will, He heareth us" (1 John 5:14).

So many of us are wanting God just to rubberstamp our own ambitions, our own desires, our own proclivities, our own ways. We don't wait before the Lord. We don't seek the Lord. We don't let God's Word abide in us, and we don't abide in Him. But we just come marching into His presence with a shopping list and wonder why God doesn't answer our prayers. We must pray in the will of God. We must surrender to Him. We must submit ourselves to the Father. Listen to it again: "*He giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God*" (James 4:6–7).

Now not only is God not going to be your answerer; He's going to be your adversary. He's going to resist you. God is going to set Himself in battle array against you. You are praying, but your prayers will anger God, if you try to use prayer as a smokescreen for repentance, and you do not get right with God. God will resist you, and it won't be merely the devil who is resisting you; it'll be God the Father that is resisting you and seeing to it that your prayers are not answered, because you've not humbled yourself; you've not submitted yourself; in your arrogance, you've tried to have your own way and ask God to superimpose His blessings upon your plan.

C. There Must Be a Standing Against the Devil

Ladies and gentlemen, there must be a sensitivity to the Spirit. Ladies and gentlemen, there must be a submission to the Father in prayer. And number three:

There must be a standing against the devil in prayer. Look, if you will, again, in verse 7: *“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you”* (James 4:7). Now why does he mention this right here? I believe that James is talking about the subject of prayer, and anybody who has tried to pray has known that the enemy will attack. Isn't that true? Isn't that true?

Have you ever endeavored to pray, and the kids will get in a fight, the telephone will ring, the beans will burn, thoughts will come into your mind, even when you get in the prayer closet? I mean, you'll shut yourself off from all of these things, but the enemy seems to come in through the keyhole, under the door. And you start to pray, and you think silly things. Do you ever think silly things, Bob, when you pray? Just silly things come in your mind—foolish things. Or, your mind goes wandering about what you need to do: got to cut the grass, or you have to go shopping or something. And you find yourself almost talking on one level and thinking on another level. What is that? That's the enemy.

You say, “Can he do that?” Indeed, he can. You know that he can take thoughts out of your mind and put thoughts in your mind? Did you know that, Gene? He can do that. The devil can do that. Or, you read there, in the parable of the sower, and Jesus said the devil is like the birds that come and steal the seed away.

Now when I'm preaching, these devil birds are flying around. He sees you sitting there, and that devil bird goes in there and picks that thought out of your mind. He doesn't want you to hear what I'm saying. So you can sit right here in church, and you look so pious, nod your head, smile, and say, “amen,” and you're off playing softball, this afternoon, in your mind. Those things are just there; the devil is just stealing that seed out of your mind.

But not only can he take thoughts out; he can put thoughts in! Can he really? You read in the Bible there where Judas betrayed Christ, and the Bible says: “Satan, having put into the heart, the mind of Judas, Judas went and betrayed Him” (John 13:2). Hmm? Takes thoughts out and puts thoughts in. And he'll do that when you pray. I mean, prayer is warfare!

And why does the devil oppose us when we pray? Why do we find it so hard to gird up the loins of our mind? Why is it so hard to pray? I'll tell you why: because the devil fears our prayers. J. Sidlow Baxter said, when he was here a couple of years ago—he said, “I believe that whenever we begin to pray, the devil must say to his demons, ‘Stop him from praying. Stop him! Boy, if he learns how to pray, he can beat us every time! But if we stop him from praying, we'll beat him every time.’”

Do you know what the devil says to us? The devil says to Bellevue, “You go ahead and have your auditorium; you have your chandelier; you have your television program;

you have your pulpits, your microphones; you have your Tom Claytons, Tommy Lanes, and Dan Carters; you have your choir; you have your flowers; you have your Sunday School, have your Church Training—have it all!—so long as you leave out the power of Almighty God, that comes through earnest, persistent praying, that will not take *no* for an answer.” *The* devil laughs *at our* organization. *He* mocks *our* schemes. *He* fears *our* prayers. Someone has well said that the devil trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees. And therefore, prayer is warfare.

I’m not trying to tell you this to discourage you, but I am telling you this to forewarn you—that you must resist the devil. And when you find out that you’re trying to pray and that this Spirit in you is desiring to bring the full heart’s devotion to Jesus Christ, and you feel that oppression, come against it in the name of Jesus. Prayer is warfare—warfare, warfare. But hallelujah! *“Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world”* (1 John 4:4). *“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you”* (James 4:7).

D. There Must Be a Separation from the World

Now what are these principles? Number one: a sensitivity to the Spirit; let Him bring your devotion to Jesus Christ. Number two: a submission to the Father. Number three: a standing in prayer against the enemy. Number four: a separation from the world. Look again, if you will, in verse 8: *“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded”* (James 4:8). Friends, defiled *hands*, dirty *hearts*, and double *minds do not get* prayers answered. We’re to be lifting holy hands to God in prayer. Cleanse your hands. It’s no deep, dark, esoteric secret why God doesn’t answer some prayer. Your sins have separated between you and your God! And your iniquities have hid His face from you, that He will not hear (Isaiah 59:1–3). The Bible says, in Psalm 66, verse 18, *“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me”* (Psalm 66:18).

“Cleanse your hands...and purify your hearts, ye double minded.” Defiled hands, dirty hearts, double mind. There must be a separation from the world. Listen to me, my beloved people. Is there in your heart, right now, a division—sin and righteousness trying to dwell in the same heart? In your mind, you’re trying to hold onto God with one hand and this world with the other hand? You’re married to Jesus and committing adultery with the world? You’re double-minded. You’re an adulterer. Be done with it! Confess it! Forsake it! Separate yourself from the world. Tell that harlot of this world, *“It’s over!”* Your affair is over, and you quit! Ask Jesus to forgive you. *“Cleanse your hands...purify your hearts, ye double minded.”* That’s a principle to get your prayers answered. It is taught over, and over, and over again in the Word of God!

People are saying, “Well, God just doesn’t answer prayer anymore.” Is your heart

clean? “Well,” you say, “I don’t have any, and I might have a little grudge toward someone.” Yeah? You’d be surprised what that little grudge is costing you. Now for most of those good, you know, nice, church-going folks, it’s not adultery; it’s not thievery; and, it’s not stealing—that’s not your problem. It’s just that attitude you have towards somebody else—that resentment, that pride, that hostility, that criticism. Be done with it! It’s not worth it. Get rid of it! *“Cleanse your hands...purify your hearts, ye double minded.”* James said earlier: *“A double minded man is unstable in all his ways”* (James 1:8). *“Let not that man think he shall receive any thing of the Lord”* (James 1:7). He’s not going to do it. God is not going to bless you! Do you say, “This one thing I do”? God does business with those who mean business.

E. There Must Be a Soberness of Purpose

Now finally, let me give you the fifth principle: not only a separation from the world, but a soberness of purpose in prayer. A soberness of purpose—a seriousness of purpose, if you will—in prayer. Continue to read, as he says, *“Be afflicted...”*—verse 9—*“Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up”* (James 4:9–10). Another reason that our prayers are not answered is sometimes they’re just half-hearted, giddy, frivolous, easily uttered, soon-forgotten prayers. We rattle off our little “Now I lay me down to sleep” type of prayer. We never get hold of God with both hands and really pray, and plead, and intercede.

Prayer is work. Prayer involves a brokenness, a weeping. That’s one of the reasons for fasting. You see, when we fast, it’s not that we earn God’s favor. You’re not going to buy a blessing by fasting. But what fasting does—it serves Heaven notice that we mean business, that we’re serious about this matter of getting our prayers answered. So many people could not tell you, 20 minutes from the time they prayed, what they prayed for, for they use little vain repetitions and rattle off little prayers.

Now there’s nothing wrong with laughter. There’s nothing wrong with joy. But there’s a time to laugh, and there’s a time to weep. And God knows that this is a time for America, who’s laughing her way into Hell, to start to weep. I tell you, friend, things are caving in around us. Communism—militant communism—is on the march. We’re murdering a million-and-a-half little babies in America every year by abortion. The pornographers are dealing their goods like a broken sewer in our land. And people are crying for freedom from restraint and no laws, and they want to do their thing; and, they’re talking about liberty like they fought for at Valley Forge, while they themselves are servants of corruption.

But not only should we weep about the wickedness of our world; we ought to weep

about the weakness of our churches, because, the problem doesn't lie at *their* doorstep; it lies at *our* doorstep. We ought to weep about the lostness of our loved ones. We ought to weep about the barrenness and powerlessness of our lives. We ought to be on our faces before God in repentance, and prayer, and weeping! As James said: "*Be afflicted, and mourn.*" People like that—they want to go to church on Sunday morning, have the pastor give them their seven-day milk bottle, and burp them on the way out. Someone has described the 20th-century Church as a "dry-eyed Church in a Hell-bent world."

General William Booth was the founder of the Salvation Army. What a man of God he was! Someone wrote General Booth and said, "General Booth, we need a revival here. We've done everything. We've organized. We've prayed. We've done everything that we know to do, and there's still no revival. What should we do?" He mailed back a terse telegram that said, "Try tears—try tears."

God said, "I've seen thy tears, and I've heard thy prayer" (2 Kings 20:5). When's the last time you ever shed a tear in prayer over some soul that was mortgaged to the devil? Listen to it again: "*Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.*"

You see, so many times, we don't mean business with God. Look in James 5, verse 16: "*Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.*" Now notice the last part of verse 16: "*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*" (James 5:16)— "*the effectual fervent prayer.*" That word *fervent* means, literally, "stretched out," like an athlete who is stretching for the goal. The prayer that is answered is a fervent prayer. God forgive the coldness, the half-heartedness, the laziness, the lackadaisical attitude that we have in our praying.

Conclusion

All right now, look up here. Look right here. There's the unasked prayer of a struggling man. There's the unanswered prayer of a selfish man. There is the unhindered prayer of a spiritual man—the spiritual man, who's sensitive to the Spirit, who is submissive to the Father, who is standing against the devil, who is separated from the world, and who is serious in his purpose. "*Ask, and ye shall receive*" (John 16:24). God answers prayer, and the hope of your life, the hope of this world, and the hope of this church is in prayer that is answered.

Let's pray. Father in Heaven, I pray now, in the name of Jesus, that You would speak to every heart, including this pastor's heart, about this matter of our prayer life. Oh, dear God, help us, for we're weak. But Lord, we bring our weakness to You. In and through Jesus our Lord.

Victorious Prayer

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: August 13, 1978

Main Scripture Text: James 4:1–10

“Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.”

JAMES 4:2

Outline

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- I. The Presumption of Un-Offered Prayer
- II. The Problem of Unacceptable Prayer
- III. The Principles of Undeniable Prayer
 - A. Sensitivity to the Spirit
 - B. Submission to the Father
 - C. Standing Against the Devil
 - D. Separation from the World
 - E. Seriousness and Soberness in our Purpose

Conclusion

Introduction

Would you turn to James chapter 4? James chapter 4. We’re continuing our message—or our series of messages—in the book of James. James chapter 4, beginning in verse 1. I’ll wait for, just a moment, until you find it. All right, *“From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not”* (James 4:1–2). Just underscore that phrase, “yet ye have not, because ye ask not.”

I want us to think this morning on this subject, “Victorious Prayer.” If there’s anything that I need to do—that you need to do, that we need to do, that everyone needs to do—it is to learn how to pray. The man who can pray can do anything, for prayer can do anything that God can do, and God can do anything. And, our desperate need in these days is to link our lives with the omnipotent God who has called upon us and told us to pray. And, Jesus said, *“ask, and ye shall receive”* (John 16:24). And, James says, “you have not, because you ask not.”

You don’t have a failure in your life, but what it is a prayer failure? You don’t have a

sin in your life, but what prayer could have prevented that sin? You don't have a genuine need in your life, but that need cannot be met through fervent believing prayer? Oh, dear friend, how we need to learn how to pray. And, in our study in the book of James this morning we're going to be thinking on this subject, victorious prayer, victorious prayer. And, we're going to study under three headings. First of all, we're going to see the presumption of un-offered prayer. And, then we're going to see the problem of unacceptable prayer. And, then we're going to see the principles of undeniable prayer. How to pray so that our prayers cannot—will not, shall not—be denied.

I. The Presumption of Un-Offered Prayer

First of all I want you to see the presumption of un-offered prayer. The first two verses: *“From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain... yet ye have not, because ye ask not”* (John 4:1–2). “Ye have not because ye ask not.” The presumption of un-offered prayer. God wants to bless us. God wants to give us what we need, but we're so presumptuous. We're so proud. We're so self-sufficient that we go about in our own strength—fighting, warring, scheming, planning, hating, killing, conniving, striving—trying in our own way to get the things that we think we need.

Do you know what's wrong in our city right now? Our city is not given over to prayer. There is no problem that cannot be solved by prayer. There are no problems too big to solve, just people too small to solve them. I want to tell you ladies and gentlemen, when we begin to pray, and to seek the face of God, then we'll know peace both domestically and in our hearts, as we seek the face of Almighty God. God wants to bless us, and God will bless us through prayer.

*More ships! Some cry, More guns! More fighters in the air!
But wise the King who calls for more prayer!*

Pray, ask and ye shall receive the Lord Jesus said. You see, it is not until we pray that God moves into action. It is prayer that links our lives with the omnipotent power of God.

A little boy was trying, one day in his play, to move a huge stone. And, he was trying with all of his might to roll that stone over, to shove the stone. And, his little muscles were bulging, and there was perspiration on his face, and he was biting his tongue and just trying to move that stone. And, his father was watching. And, his father said to him, “Son, are you using all of your strength?” And, the little boy said, “Yes, daddy, I'm using all of my strength.” And, his dad said, “No, you're not. You haven't asked me to help you.”

Sometimes we're burdened down with weighty burdens and problems, and we strive, and we cry, and we fight, and we war, and we wrangle and we're saying, "I'm doing everything I know to do." Have you ask your Father to help? Have you linked your life with His? Could it be that God wants to bless you? And, the reason that God is not blessing you could be so utterly simple. You have not, because you ask not.

I told some of you a while back a story that I think bears repeating right now, and I don't like to repeat too much, but this is so apt. When I was down in Florida, pastoring a church as a young man, in college, I had a little country church down in the Indian River section of Florida where the finest citrus fruit—I believe—in the world is grown. And, I went down to that little country church out in the middle of the orange groves. And, one of the leading deacons down there, a kind man, who'd been so good to us through the years said, "Adrian, I want to give you some oranges from my grove to take back to college." I said, "Very well, Mr. Ingram." But, I wasn't prepared, for he'd brought several huge duffle bags full of oranges, canvas sacks full of oranges. I said, "Mr. Ingram, Joyce and I can't eat all of those oranges before they spoil." He said, "Well, you take them back to college and give them away." I said, "Very well." And, so I put all of those oranges in the trunk of my automobile and drove them back to college, lugged them up the stairs to our second floor apartment there—garage apartment—and had all of those oranges there in a closet, and they were taking up a lot of space and they were starting to mildew, and starting to spoil, and I just couldn't give them away fast enough. It was certainly more than we could eat.

But, one afternoon—or noon time—Joyce had prepared soup and sandwiches for us between classes, and I was eating and I looked out in the back yard and I saw a little fellow about so high—knee-high to a grasshopper—sneaking around in the backyard. And, it became obvious to me that he was going to steal an orange out of my yard. Now, we only had one orange tree and it was a sour orange tree. Have you ever tasted a sour orange? The most bitter fruit known to man. One bite and you have lockjaw. It's unbelievably sour. And, this little fellow was going to—he didn't know they were sour—and he was going to steal one. And, I just watched and I saw him as he took that orange and made his way off. I didn't have much money, but I would have given a dollar to see him take the first bite. I thought about it. You know, the Bible says, "*The bread of deceit is sweet, but afterward a man's mouth shall be filled with gravel*" (Proverbs 20:17). Well, it's easy to make the same application to swiping sour oranges.

But, you know, the thing that I could not get out of my heart, and out of my mind, is this: Suppose that little fellow had come up those stairs, knocked on my door and said, "Mister, may I have one of those oranges?" You know what I would have said to him? "Absolutely not, because it's sour. But, son if you will come in here, I will load you down with more oranges than you can carry, and the best. I've got oranges that are spoiling.

I've got oranges that I need to get rid of.”

It's going to amaze you when you get to Heaven friend. I believe God's going to call you over and open the door to his storehouse and say, “Look in there. Do you see those blessings that are soured, and spoiled, and rusty and mildewed? Those are your blessings. Those are things I wanted you to have, those are things that I wanted to load you down with, but I couldn't give them to you. You went your own way warring, and scheming, and planning and conniving, and figuring and you have not because you ask not.”

*Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry,
Everything to God in prayer.*

Oh, friend, the presumption of un-offered prayer. Did you know that prayerlessness is a sin? It's a sin. The Bible says, “...*God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you...*” (1 Samuel 12:23). Did you know the Bible tells us that we're to pray all of the time? The Bible says, very clearly in 1 Thessalonians, chapter 5 and verse 17 that we are to, “*Pray without ceasing*” (1 Thessalonians 5:17) The Bible says in Luke chapter 18, verse 1 that Jesus “*spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint*” (Luke 18:1). And, so you see—look, when you don't pray, you're not just simply missing a blessing, you're committing a sin. You're doing without the things that God wants you to have, and you're sinning against the Lord.

And, let me say this—as I said in the introduction to this message—there is no sin in your life but what prayer would have prevented it. The Bible says in Mark 14, verse 38: “*Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation...*” (Mark 14:38).

John Bunyan wrote in *Pilgrim's Progress*, “Prayer will make a man cease from sin, and sin will entice a man to cease from prayer.” Are you praying? Most of us talk about prayer like we do the weather. Boy, the weatherman really missed it today, didn't he? I mean the one I listened to—and I know him personally, so he'll know which one he is, I'm not going to call any names—but, he missed it a hundred and eighty degrees and if you're listening... I heard about a weatherman who had to leave town for health reasons. The weather didn't agree with him. Well, it didn't agree with this one.

What was I talking about? Oh, listen friend, prayer is like the weather. We talk about it and don't do much about it. There is no substitute for prayer. Not energy, not enthusiasm, not eloquence, not intellect. There is no substitute for prayer. My life is no greater than my prayer life. What I am that is important is not what I am on this platform, but what I am in the closet before I come here. What you are in your life when you teach your class is linked to your prayer life.

Oh, my dear friends, this church needs to learn how to pray. We are asking God to lead us into a program that is so immense, so big, so unbelievable, that it absolutely cannot be done—will not be done—unless we pray. I believe God wants us to have what we need. And, I believe he’s going to give it to us. And, I believe we’re going to be able to raise the money to build these buildings. But, I believe it’ll be God who does it. And, we will have because we shall ask. And, our Heavenly Father will answer that prayer. I’m telling you that if prayerlessness is a sin, then some of us need to repent. And, before you do anything else you need to repent of the sin of prayerlessness. We can do more than pray after we pray, but we can do no more than pray until we have prayed. Oh, the presumption, the arrogance of un-offered prayer. Are you guilty of that sin?

II. The Problem of Unacceptable Prayer

But, the second thing James speaks about, not only the presumption of un-offered prayer, but he also speaks of the problem of unacceptable prayer. Sometimes the problem is not that we don’t offer our prayers, the problem is that sometimes we offer them and God will not accept them. God will not hear our prayers. And why?

Well, let’s see what James says. And, I’m reading here in James now, chapter 4, in verse 3: *“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss”—that is, you’re asking wrongly—“that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?”—and, that word enmity means “warfare with God”—“whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:3–4).*

Now, here James addresses himself to the problem of unacceptable prayer. Sometimes people pray long and loud, but their prayers are not answered. Their prayers get no higher than the ceiling, no higher than the light bulb, because their prayer is unacceptable. And, why is it unacceptable? Because it is based on the wrong motivation. There are people who are wanting to sacrifice the answer to their prayer upon the altar of their lusts. They’re not asking for the glory of God. They’re simply asking that they might consume it upon their lust. Their motivation is basically selfish, and basically sinful, and God is not going to subsidize our sin. God is not going to underwrite our selfishness.

And, James illustrates what he’s talking about in verse 4, when he says, *“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4).*

Now, what is that talking about? Well, let me tell you this: That when you and I became Christians, when we were saved, when we were born again, we became the

heavenly bride, and Jesus the heavenly bridegroom. That's a figure of speech, and the way that the Bible describes our relationship with Christ. He is the bridegroom. We're the bride. And, just as a bride should be chaste, and pure, and separated and give herself to the groom alone, the church should belong to Jesus Christ and Him only. Do you understand that? Paul says, *"I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy, for I have espoused you to Christ as a chaste and pure virgin"* (2 Corinthians 11:2) Oh, we're to be jealous for the cause of Christ. We are to belong to Jesus and to him alone. We are married to our Lord. That's the figure of speech. That's the metaphor that James is referring to here.

But, now there's another suitor who comes along. And, this other suitor is the world. And, the world is like a scheming, conniving, perverted, adulterous man who comes away to try to lure our affections from the Lord Jesus Christ. And, the Bible says that when we turn from Jesus, and when we become friends with the world, we commit spiritual adultery, spiritual adultery. *"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God"* (James 4:4).

Now, let me just put it to you very plain. Suppose living here in the city of Memphis there is a fine man who marries a young lady, and she stands at the marriage altar and says—we'll call him John—"I take thee John to be my lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold, from this day forward, in sickness as in health, in poverty as is in wealth, to death, 'til death do us part. I will keep myself to you alone so long as we both shall live, so help me God."

And, then suppose after she makes that commitment to John, over here she falls in love with a fellow named Bill. And, she and Bill begin to live an adulterous relationship, and John knows about it. And, then suppose she comes to John and she says, "John, I have some things I need. John, would you please give me some money and, John would you please let me have the keys to the automobile? Bill and I are going to New Orleans for a weekend. John, may I have some money?" Now, do you think that John is going to subsidize that adultery? Do you think that John is going to give her what she requests? Do you think that John is going to say, "Here, I'm going to underwrite your sin?" Of course not.

That's what God is saying. God is saying that when we come and become a friend of the world, and then we come to God and we say, "God, you give me that I might commit spiritual adultery with the world." God says that our prayers are not going to be answered. And, it's very simple and very plain. The reason that some of our prayers are not answered is they're so selfish. They're so worldly. They're so ungodly.

We're not interested in the glory of God. So many prayers are worldly at their base, and the motivation is not for the glory of God. The motivation is simply that we might

have more, do more, enjoy more. And, James says, *“You ask and you receive not because you ask amiss, that you might consume it upon your lusts. You adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that friendship with the world is warfare with God. Whosoever therefore shall be the friend of the world is the enemy of God”* (James 4:3–4).

There is the problem of unacceptable prayer. And, you said, “Well, I thought I could come to God and get my needs met.” You can. My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches and glory by Christ Jesus. And, you may have your selfish desires denied, but you’ll never have your legitimate needs denied if you come the right way. You may pray for personal needs, but you may not pray for sinful and selfish desires and expect to have your prayer answered.

III. The Principles of Undeniable Prayer

Now, the third thing, and the most important thing I want us to notice. Not only the problem—or the presumption rather—of un-offered prayer. And, not only the problem of unacceptable prayer, but I would like for you to notice thirdly, the principles of undeniable prayer.

How can we pray so that our prayers will not be denied? How can we pray so as to get through with God? How can we pray so as to link our lives with omnipotence? James gives us five principles of undeniable prayer. And, I want you to look at them very carefully, and this is vital to you folks. This is vital to me. We need to have our prayers answered more than anything else, and James delineates these principles, and I would pray to God that every one of us today can learn these five principles of undeniable prayer. Are you ready for them?

A. Sensitivity to the Spirit

Principle number one is sensitivity to the Spirit, sensitivity to the Spirit. Look in verse 5: *“Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?”* (James 4:5).

Now, who is the Spirit that dwells in us? The Holy Spirit. And this word *lusteth* means he has “strong desires,” strong desires. It has no sexual connotation in the Greek language whatever. But, the Holy Spirit within us has some very strong desires, and the Holy Spirit within us is very envious. Now, what is he envious for? He is envious for the cause of Christ.

May I give you another translation? And, listen to it very carefully. The Holy Spirit which He made to dwell in us jealously, yearns for the entire devotion of the heart. The Holy Spirit, which He has made to dwell in us jealously, yearns for the entire devotion of the heart. Do you know what God demands of you before you pray? Your whole heart. And, do you know what the Holy Spirit is saying in you as He lives in you right now?

Give your entire devotion to Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is jealous for the cause of Christ.

Did you know that the Bible teaches that God is a jealous God? Now, some people don't understand that. Some people think that jealousy is always bad. Jealousy is not always bad, sometimes jealousy is good. When God is a jealous God, then jealousy is good.

You see, many of us are jealous when we have no right to be jealous. Brother Whitmire has no right to be jealous of other musicians, because he doesn't own the realm of music. And, there are other musicians. An athlete has no right to be jealous of another athlete because he doesn't own athletics. There are other athletes who have a perfect right to be an athlete. I have no right to be jealous of another preacher because I don't own preaching. There are other preachers, but there's only one God. *"I am the Lord thy God... there is none other."* (Hosea 13:4). *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me"*, (Exodus 20:3), *"...for I am the Lord thy God. I'm a jealous God"* (Deuteronomy 5:9).

And, God does not want a place in your life, and God does not want prominence in your life. God demands preeminence. And, the Bible says that all things Jesus Christ may have the preeminence, and the Holy Spirit whom God has given you is constantly over and over and over again saying in your heart and in your life, "Jesus is Lord." Jesus is Lord. Jesus is Lord. Do you want to get your prayers answered? Then you be sensitive to the Spirit. Be sensitive to the Spirit.

But, this is what the Bible calls praying in the Spirit. Tonight if God—if Jesus—tarries and I'm still alive, and you're here, I want to preach on praying in the Spirit. So, I won't take more time today, but the Bible teaches that we're to pray in the Spirit.

You see, we pray in the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father. The Holy Spirit wants to think through our minds. The Holy Spirit wants to feel through our hearts. The Holy Spirit wants to speak through our lips. The Holy Spirit wants to weep through our eyes. The Holy Spirit wants to groan through our spirits in prayer. We're to be praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.

And, so James says first of all, the first principle is sensitivity to the Spirit. You see, dear friend, the Holy Spirit teaches you how to pray. *"...we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered"* (Romans 8:26). No wonder sometimes our prayers are not answered.

B. Submission to the Father

Now, the second principle, not only must there be sensitivity to the Spirit, but there also must be submission to the Father, submission to the Father. I want you to look

beginning now in verse 6, what James says, *“But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God...”* (James 4:6–7). Submit yourselves to God. There is no answered prayer until you’re submitted to God. That’s what the Holy Spirit makes us sensitive about. That’s what the Holy Spirit is so jealously yearning over us about, to make us submissive to God. Do you know why sometimes our prayers are not answered? We’re saying not thou will, but mine be done. Let me tell you something friend. Prayer is not some exercise where you talk God into doing what He doesn’t want to do. You’ll never do that. Prayer is not your bending God’s will to fit your will. Prayer is finding the will of God and getting in on it. And, therefore when we come to God, we must come to God saying, *“...Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done...”* (Luke 11:2).

Do you know where man got in trouble? In the Garden of Eden when the first Adam said, “Not thy will, but mine be done.” Thank God for the second Adam, the Lord Jesus, who prayed in another garden, *“...not my will, but thine, be done”* (Luke 22:42). And, that’s the way prayer is to be answered. When we come to God submitting our wills to the Father. Are you submitted to the will of God? This is the confidence that we have in Him. The Bible says, *“that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us”* (1 John 5:14).

Our problem is that we’re so broken—so unbroken, so haughty, so arrogant. We come strutting into the presence of God. No wonder God doesn’t answer our prayers. *“Submit yourselves therefore to God.”* (James 4:7). Are you submitted to God? Is His will your will? Do you love, more than anything else today, to do the will of God? I say, “Do you?” If you don’t, you’re wasting your time when you pray. Prayer is not for rebels. James says, “You have not because you ask not.” You ask and receive not because you ask amiss. Submit yourselves therefore to God.

Oh, my dear friends, when we begin to take this thing of the Lordship of Jesus Christ seriously, then our prayers are going to be answered. Submitting ourselves to the Lord.

C. **Standing Against the Devil**

Now, let me give you the third principle. Not only sensitivity to the Spirit. And, not only submission to the father. But, standing against the devil. Look again, if you will please, in verse 7. James chapter 4, verse 7: *“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you”* (James 4:7). Have you ever thought about the devil fleeing from you? Hmm? To most of us the idea is ridiculous. We think the best we might be able to do is to get the devil to leave us alone, and that not for very long. But, Jesus said, *“Behold, I give you authority over all the power of the enemy”* (Luke 10:19). *“...greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world”* (1 John 4:4). And, a principle,

a powerful prayer, prayer that cannot be denied is this: that when you pray, you must enter into warfare with the devil. Prayer is warfare.

You know the Bible says, *“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil”* (Ephesians 6:11). And, the Bible ends that passage in Ephesians 6 with saying—praying it therefore in the Spirit—and *“all pray in supplication”* (Ephesians 6:18). You see, the warfare is prayer. When we put on the armor, we’re just getting ready to go to battle. We have an enemy—a real enemy, a coming enemy, a sinister enemy, a malevolent enemy—an enemy who hates us.

Now, don’t get inflated about that. It’s not because you’re so important in your own right that the devil hates you. The devil’s real worries are with God, and wicked persons have always known that if you cannot hurt an individual, then hurt someone that individual loves and you’ve hurt them anyway. And, that’s the reason the devil’s warfare is against you. But, you see, God’s warfare is against the devil. And, how does God intend to win the war? Through the prayers of His people. Isn’t that strange? God intends to win the war through the prayers of His people. Omnipotent deity has limited itself to our prayers. And, God moves when we pray, and prayer is warfare.

And, oh dear friend, the devil, the devil understands that. Let me tell you something about the devil. The devil doesn’t mind if we meet here this morning, not at all. He doesn’t mind if this choir sings. The devil doesn’t mind if you have your preacher, and the devil doesn’t mind if you do everything except pray. Now, pay attention now. The devil mocks our scheme, the devil laughs at our organization, the devil sneers at our buildings, but the devil hears our prayers. The devil will do anything he can do to keep you from praying. The devil will even encourage you to read the Bible if it’ll keep you from praying. The devil will encourage you even to go to church on Sunday morning, if it’ll keep you from praying. If, dear friend, you didn’t have time both to come to church and to pray this morning, it’d have been better for you to stay home and pray than to come here this morning.

Now, you have time to do both. So many people get here on Sunday morning with a quarter in one hand, and a nickel in the other and “Gunsmoke” on the brain. There is time to do both if they had planned it right. But, I’m just trying to tell you there is no substitute for prayer. The devil doesn’t care what I preach, what I do, what I say. He says, ‘Go ahead and have your church, go ahead and have your organ, go ahead and have your choir, go ahead and have your building, go ahead and have your congregation, go ahead and have your preacher, as long as you leave out the power of Almighty God that comes to earnest, persistent, powerful prayer that will not take no for an answer.’”

Now, once dear friend, we’re sensitive to the Spirit and submitted to the Father, then and then alone, we’re ready to resist the devil, and to stand against the devil. Up until

that time you might as well be throwing snowballs at the rock of Gibraltar. And, before you resist the devil, you better submit to God, or you're going to be in a lot of trouble.

But, when you submit to God, and when you can say I am jealous for the cause of Christ and Jesus Christ is Lord, then you can say to that devil, "Devil, in the name of Jesus Christ, I defy you, I repudiate you, I resist you, you're trespassing on my Father's property. In the name of Jesus, and in the power of the blood, be gone." And he must flee from you. Powerful prayer.

D. **Separation from the World**

Notice, first of all, there's the principle of sensitivity to the Spirit. Secondly, there's the principle of submission to the father. Thirdly, there is the principle of standing against the devil. Fourthly, there is the principle of separation from the world. Look in verse 8, if you will of this same chapter, "*Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded*" (James 4:8).

Now, what is James talking about? The principle of separation from the world. And, you might as well not try to be separated from the world until you resist the devil. And, you might as well try not to resist the devil until you submit to God. And, you might as well not try to submit to God until you're sensitive to the Holy Spirit. But, once you have made the submission, and once you've made this resistance, now is the time. Now is the time, dear friends, to come, to be separated from this world. You see, dear friend, it's not that if you can clean up your life God will accept you. No, no, no. You can't clean up your life until you've come to God, 'til you get you to repudiate the devil. You're never going to have victory over the world.

But, what is James saying? When we come to this point in our prayer life that we cannot come to God with dirty hands, we cannot come to God with divided hearts, we cannot come to God with double-minds. We can't come to God facing both ways. "For whosoever is a friend of the world, is the enemy of God." (James 4:4). And, God didn't save us, and bathe this world with His blood to have us serve the devil. Is there some unrepented sin in your life? Is there some habit, some attitude, some grudge, some gossip, some resentment? Then get rid of it. Cleanse your hands. Purify your hearts, your double-minded.

Do you remember what James has already said in another place? "*A double minded man is unstable in all his ways*" (James 1:8). "*For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord*" (James 1:7). Now, are you going to let go of this world and take hold of God with both hands? Then, dear friend, you'll know power of prayer. The Bible says, "*ye shall search after me and find me when you search with your whole heart*" (Jeremiah 29:13). If there's anything that God despises, it is halfhearted religion, halfhearted praying. There must be a separation from the world. The Bible says clearly

and plainly in Psalms 66, verse 18: *“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me”* (Psalms 66:18).

So much of our praying is, “God bless us anyhow. I’m not going to repent of my sin, I’m not going to let go of the things of this world, but God, please bless me, please answer my prayers anyway.” Well, He’s not going to do it. *“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me”* (Psalms 66:18). That doesn’t say, “If I’ve sinned, the Lord will not hear me because we’ve all sinned.” But, if you have regard for iniquity—you see, we all have our little pet sins. Let this notebook represent your little pet sin. So, we have a little pet sin here. And, it’s right there in our heart. Oh, nice fellow. Hmm I really love that sin, see. And, now I come to God and I have regard for it. “Now, Lord, this is what I want you to do for me. Nice fellow. Now, Lord I have a child that’s sick. Hmm, pretty boy.” Ha, do you think God’s going to hear our prayer? Double-minded, divided heart, dirty hands.

And, oh, there must be a repentance. There must be a forsaking of that sin. *“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me”* (Psalms 66:18). God cannot bless, God cannot honor our prayers when there’s sin in our heart. Therefore, James says, *“Cleanse your hands... and purify your hearts, ye double minded”* (James 4:8). The fourth principle therefore, victorious prayer, is separation from the world.

E. **Seriousness and Soberness in our Purpose**

And, then the last principle that James mentions is here in chapter 4, beginning in verse 9. And, it’s the principle that I call seriousness and soberness in our purpose. James says, *“Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up”* (James 4:9–10).

I tell you one more reason why our prayers are not answered. Because our prayers are not fervent. They’re giddy, silly, half-hearted, easily uttered, soon forgotten. James says, “it is time that we prayed in keeping with the urgency, and the emergency, of the need.” We need to learn to weep before the Lord.

Conclusion

Hezekiah was about to die. He turned his face to God and prayed and God said, *“I have seen thy tears, I have heard thy prayer”* (2 Kings 20:5). Has God seen your tears? Oh, we have plenty of organizers, but not too many agonizers. I’m preaching to myself, but I want to ask you a question. When is the last time you ever shed a tear over some soul that was mortgaged to the devil? When’s the last time you missed a meal to pray? When’s the last time you fasted and prayed? When’s the last time you spent a night in prayer? When’s the last time when you got hold of God and said, “O God, I will not let

you go, lest you bless me.” God forgive our weak prayers, our easy prayers, our lazy prayers, our “take it and leave it” prayers, our own broken prayers, our own dead prayers. A broken and a contrite heart, *“thy wilt not despise, O God”* (Psalm 51:17).

James says, “Get serious about your praying.” James says, in the fifth chapter, *“...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”* (James 5:16). And, I have sensed that Twentieth Century Christianity is missing primarily in fervency when it comes to prayer. There’s something about it. And, God can tell when we mean business. O God, help me, help us, help this church to learn the secret of victorious prayer.

How to Pray in the Spirit

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: August 13, 1978

Main Scripture Text: James 4:5

*“Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain,
The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?”*

JAMES 4:5

Outline

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- I. The Holy Spirit's Ministry
 - A. Prayer Is Our Greatest Christian Privilege
 - B. Prayer Is Our Greatest Christian Service
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Conclusion

Introduction

And, we say “Amen” to that song. Come on down Lord Jesus and come soon. Turn to the book of James, would you please for just a moment, the book of James chapter 4, and you will remember this morning we were preaching on triumphant prayer. Prayer that prevails, and we gave you some principles of prayer that cannot be denied. And, among those principles was a very vital principle that we call sensitivity to the Spirit. Look in James chapter 4, and verse 5. James chapter 4 and verse 5: *“Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?”* (James 4:5).

Now, while that verse is somewhat hard to interpret, what it really means is this: I'm convinced, that the Holy Spirit within us is very, very jealous for the cause of Christ. And, the Scripture says that over and over again, that God has given the Holy Spirit to us and the Holy Spirit within us is there to glorify Christ and to promote the cause of

Christ. And, it is absolutely essential that you understand this if you are to pray vitally, because this is what we call praying in the Spirit. And, so that's what we're going to be talking about tonight, "How to Pray in the Spirit."

And, tonight I want us to think about the Holy Spirit's ministry, first of all to us, and then secondly the Holy Spirit's ministry through us, as we're talking about praying in the Spirit.

Incidentally, I would like you to check these three other verses of Scripture before we get into the message. You might write it down there in the margin by James, or you might just want to turn to it. But, look please in Ephesians. Ephesians chapter 6, and verse 18. Ephesians chapter 6, and verse 18. There the Bible gives us this admonition, "*Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit...*" (Ephesians 6:18). Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.

I. The Holy Spirit's Ministry

All right now, I want you to jot down this verse. In Jude, verse 20. There's no chapter because there's only one chapter in Jude, so we don't give you a chapter designation, just the book and the verse. Listen to it. Jude, next to the last book in the Bible. Jude verse 20: "*But ye beloved, building up yourselves in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit*" (Jude 1:20). Praying in the Holy Spirit. Again, prayer in the Spirit is mentioned.

Now, the third Scripture that I want you to notice in conjunction with the Scripture in James is found in Romans chapter 8, beginning in verse 25—excuse me, verse 26: "*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself*"—and may I pause here to say that itself is a poor translation, it could be and should be interpreted, "but the Spirit Himself"—"*maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered*" "*And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he*"—the Spirit—"maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:26–27).

A. Prayer Is Our Greatest Christian Privilege

May I say ladies and gentlemen, that prayer is the greatest Christian privilege that we have? Of all of the privileges that God has given us, beyond a shadow of any doubt and without any peradventure or argument, prayer is our greatest Christian privilege. And, the need of the hour is for loving prayer, laboring prayer, lingering prayer, listening prayer.

B. Prayer Is Our Greatest Christian Service

But, not only is prayer our greatest Christian privilege. Prayer is also our greatest Christian service. Too many times we think of prayer as the means of getting ready to

serve God rather than as the means of serving God. So many times we think if we pray, then we can serve God better. But, my friend, may I tell you that you are serving God when you pray. And, those of you who are bound, and shut in, and can't do other things, you say, "I can't serve the Lord." You can pray can't you? And, if you pray, you're serving the Lord.

C. **Prayer Is Our Greatest Christian Failure**

All right, but may I say that not only is prayer the greatest Christian privilege, and not only is prayer the greatest Christian service, but alas, prayer so frequently is the greatest Christian failure. We pray but our prayers are not answered.

Isaiah chapter 1, and verse 15. God spoke to Isaiah's generation, and said, "*And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear...*" (Isaiah 1:15). Now, this is strange, for God wants to answer our prayers. And, yet God says they're certain situations in which He turns His face away. And, God says in spite of the palpation of our prayers, He will not hear.

Now, why is that? I'm convinced that one of the greatest reasons our prayers are so fruitless, and so powerless, and one of the reasons that our prayers do not reach Heaven is that we do not pray in the Holy Spirit. Praying in the Spirit will change prayer from a weary grudge to a delightful privilege.

II. **The Holy Spirit's Ministry Through Us**

Now, let me speak therefore, about the Spirit's ministry through us. What does the Holy Spirit do through us? Well, He gives us strength where we do not have strength to pray. Look again please, if you will, in Romans 8. We're still in Romans 8. If you're still in the neighborhood and haven't driven out yet. In Romans chapter 8, I want you to notice a significant series of verses beginning in verse 5. In Romans 8 he says, "*For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh...*" Romans 8:5 "*For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh...*" (Romans 8:5).

Now, when the Bible uses the term *flesh*, the Bible does not mean the skin and bones. But, the Bible means a principle, a way of life that we inherited from Adam. Actually, when the Bible uses the word *flesh*, it means our old unredeemed nature. "*For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded*"—or fleshly minded—"*is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace*"—and, then put a star by verse 7—"*Because the carnal mind*"—that is the fleshly mind—"*is enmity against God*"—now, that word *enmity* means *warfare*—"*for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be*" (Romans 8:5–7).

Now, you have within you a spiritual nature. But, you also have a fleshly nature and

there's a civil war that goes on within you. For the Bible says, "*The spirit lusteth against the flesh and the flesh against the Spirit: and these two are contrary, the one to the other*" (Galatians 5:17). And, when you go to pray a battle begins between your spiritual nature and your fleshly carnal nature. And, your carnal nature does not want to pray. Your carnal nature is set against prayer. Look again at verse 7: "*Because the carnal mind is enmity against God...*" (Romans 8:7).

Have you ever wondered why it's so hard to pray? Now, let me just ask you a question. Be honest. Is it hard for you to pray at least some of the time? Lift your hand. And, sometimes you say, "What on earth is wrong with me? I love God, I believe in prayer, I know I ought to pray and I want to pray, but sometimes it's the hardest thing in the world for me to pray." Can you agree to that? Can you bear witness to that? Well, why is it? Because there is something in you that is at warfare with God. There is a nature in you that is not subject to the law of God, "neither indeed can be."

And, you find yourself, sometimes when you go to pray, with absolutely no desire to pray. You will find yourself with wandering thoughts. Your mind will gather wool. You will find yourself with unbelief crowding in upon you. You will find yourself with no knowledge of God's will. You will find yourself, when you pray, with no sense whatever of God's presence. It seems like God is ten billion miles away, and yet you love God. And, you know you ought to pray, and you want to pray, but there is a principle in you that we call the carnal mind.

It is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. Indeed it is at warfare with God. And, we make an extra start, we resolve we're going to do better. We hear someone preach a sermon on prayer and tell us why we ought to pray and we say, "I'm going to pray," and then we fall flat on our face in our prayer efforts. Why is it? Well, dear friend, there's something in you that has no stomach for prayer any more than my dog has for the opera, or me either for that matter. And, it is a carnal mind that is not subject to the law of God.

A. There Is Weakness in Us

Now, this carnal mind, and this flesh nature, is a form of weakness in us. And, the sooner we admit it the better off we will be. Notice, again if you would please, the weakness that is in us, and we need to accept this weakness. For the Bible says here, in verse 26 of this same chapter of Romans 8: "*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities...*" (Romans 8:26).

Now, you know one of the hardest things for a Christian to admit is that he's infirm, that he's weak. We go around always denying that we're weak, trying to demonstrate that we're not weak, when indeed we are weak. And, let me tell you that you might as well bow your head and accept your weakness. Don't deny it, accept it, for two reasons.

Number one: the Bible declares it. You haven't got an inferiority complex. You're inferior. Just accept it. The Bible speaks of our weakness, the weakness of our flesh and the Spirit helps our infirmities.

B. Your Weakness Is an Asset

But, now notice, not only should accept it because the Bible teaches it, but believe it or not because your weakness is really an asset. Your weakness is really an asset. Why does God allow you to continue to have that weakness? I'll tell you why. To keep you from independence in your prayers—to keep you depending upon him, to keep you weak—because in the Bible the secret of strength is understanding your weakness, and therefore no longer depending upon yourself.

Listen to this passage in II Corinthians chapter 12, and verse 9. God is speaking to the Apostle Paul—a man that we would think was a strong man—but God said to Paul, *“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness...”* (II Corinthians 12:9). Do you hear that? God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. Paul said, *“...for when I am weak, then am I strong”* (II Corinthians 12:10). The Spirit of God helps us in our weakness. And, many of us say the reason that I don't pray any better than I do is that I'm too weak, but the truth of the matter is you may not be weak enough. You may not have really understood just how weak you are so that you no longer struggle to pray in the flesh, but you begin to pray in the Spirit.

You see, there are two ways to pray. One is for the 'ol flesh to try to pray, and that's the reason why it's so much work. The other way to pray is to pray the way the Bible teaches us to pray, admitting our weakness, casting ourselves upon God, no longer having a self-sufficiency in prayer, but praying in the Spirit.

You see, God allows us to stay perpetually weak that we might be perpetually dependent upon the Holy Spirit of God. There are six enemies that keep us from praying. And, I want you to see how praying the Spirit is the answer to each of these six enemies.

1. Indifference

Now, first of all, there is the enemy of indifference—indifference—where we just don't feel like praying. We have a spiritual lethargy. We have no real desire to pray. It's sort of a spirit of bondage where we are just lethargic about the spiritual thing. Somebody said, *“The greatest problem in America is apathy, but who cares.”*

Now, I think that's the way we feel about this matter prayer, sometimes we're just really indifferent to pray. Do you want me to tell you why you don't pray more than you do pray? Is you don't want to? We find time to do what we really want to do. It's not that we don't have time to pray. There is just an indifference about us. The truth is that our flesh has no appetite for prayer whatever, because the carnal mind is enmity against

God. For it indeed is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So quit trying to cover it up. Admit that the reason that you don't pray is that you don't want to. Just go ahead and admit it.

There's something in you that doesn't want to pray. That's hard to say, isn't it? 'Cause we all try to impress each other with our spirituality. But, I'll be honest, there's something in me that doesn't want to pray. There's something in me that absolutely rebels at going to the place of prayer. You say, "What? And, you're a preacher." Yes. And, you're the same way. There's something in you that doesn't want to pray. There's something in you that is indifferent to the matter of prayer. It's that 'ol carnal nature.

Well, how does praying in the Holy Spirit help you to want to pray? Well, I want you to look here in Romans chapter 8, verse 15: "*For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father*" (Romans 8:15). Who is it that's crying, "Abba, Father" in us? It's the Holy Spirit of God. You see, the Spirit of God loves to pray. He wants to pray. And, when you turn that Holy Spirit loose in you, He then gives you the energy and the desire to pray. It is the Spirit of God in you that is crying out, "Abba, Father." Or, right along side that verse just jot down Galatians chapter 4, and verse 6. And the Bible says, "*And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father*" (Galatians 4:6). Because I'm a son of God, God put the Spirit of His Son into my heart, and it is the Holy Spirit in me that cries out, "Abba, Father."

And oh, I like that term, "Abba, Father." I wish I had time just to talk about that. It's an Aramaic term—it's not a Greek term—it's a diminutive term. It literally means *daddy, father*—daddy, father. Have you ever thought of the great God who scooped out the oceans, and heaped up the mountains, and flung out the sun, the moon and the stars as being your daddy? Oh, we thought of Him as the great eternal God, the everlasting Father. But God has sent forth His Spirit into our hearts crying, Abba, Father. Oh, the tender devotion and emotion of the Holy Spirit of God. He is the one who does the praying—if we'll let Him—if we'll turn Him loose in our hearts. And, may I tell you that the problem of indifference to prayer may never be settled until you begin pray in the Spirit. It is the Spirit in you that will give you that to desire to pray that your old carnal nature does not have. So, enemy number one is handled by the Holy Spirit. That enemy I call indifference.

2. Ignorance

Now, there's another enemy and that's the enemy that we call ignorance, ignorance. Look again please, if you will, in Romans chapter 8 and notice verse 26: "*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought...*" (Romans 8:26). We don't know. Have you ever gone to the place of prayer and gotten discouraged because you didn't know what to pray for? I do. Sometimes when I

go to pray there are so many of you to pray for, and there are so many things to pray for, and so many opportunities to pray that sometimes it gets discouraging. I know I can't get it all done. I know I can't pray for everything, and sometimes if I would let that type of thinking get me down I'd say, "If I can't pray for everything, why pray for anything?" Who knows what to pray for? There is so much to pray for, now isn't there? We don't know what to pray for.

All right, you see, if I tried to pray for every possibility of prayer, my prayer would cease to be the kind of a force that it ought to be. And, no longer would my prayer be a river that is channeled, my prayer would become just like a dismal swamp. If my prayer is to be effective, it just be selective.

Now, how am I going to know for whom to pray? How, on Wednesday night when you get that hospital list there—and of course, theoretically, you could pray for all of those persons—but is there someone that the Holy Spirit especially wants you to intercede for? And, in this church family, and in the leadership, and in our city, and in our nation, and in our world—what about all of the missionaries, what about all of the countries of the world, what about all of the opportunities? No one human being can pray about all of those things at one time, but the Holy Spirit of God knows what you ought to pray for. "...we know not what we should pray for as we ought..." (Romans 8:26)—and the best Christian, in my estimation who ever lived, the Apostle Paul said that, so that makes me feel in pretty good company when I don't know what I ought to pray for. He didn't know what he ought to pray for. And, not only do we know not what we ought to pray for, but we don't know how to pray for what we ought to pray for when we find out what we ought to pray for.

Now, what I mean by that is this. Suppose the Lord—here, suppose there's an elderly man in his seventies, eighties, nineties, and he's sick. And, you go to pray for him. Do you pray, "Lord, heal him?" Or do you pray, "Lord, take him to Heaven?" Huh? Have you ever faced that with an elderly person? Do you remember the night we prayed here that God would take Dr. Robert G. Lee to Heaven, and took him to Heaven that same night? Do you remember that? I felt impressed of the Holy Spirit to pray that prayer, "Lord, take him home, it's time." And, I believe the Holy Spirit of God put that prayer in our hearts. How are we going to know exactly, precisely, what to pray for after we determine who to pray for? What to pray for the person, or what to pray in the incidents. We know not what we should pray for as we ought. Thank God for the blessed Holy Spirit, who not only overcomes our problem of indifference, but the Holy Spirit overcomes our problem of ignorance, and He knows how to pray in the will of God.

Notice verse 27 of this chapter, "*And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the*

will of God" (Romans 8:27). Hallelujah. This is the confidence that we have in Him. If we ask Him anything according to His will, He heareth us. And, the secret of praying in the will of God is absolutely praying in the Holy Spirit. This is the only way that I can pray in the will of God, and that you can pray in the will of God. Thank God the Holy Spirit knows what to pray for.

I love that description of the Holy Spirit in Isaiah chapter 11, and verse 2. The Bible describes him with these words: "*And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD*" (Isaiah 11:2). Do you know? Do you need wisdom, understanding, counsel? Then you must pray in the Holy Spirit so you'll know what to pray for.

3. Impotence

All right, there is another problem that we have that the Holy Spirit helps us with. And, it's not only the problem of indifference, and the problem of ignorance, but it is the problem of impotence—impotence—or just simply our weakness, our inability. Have you ever tried to pray when you get a dull headache? Have you ever tried to pray when you get sleepy? Have you ever tried to pray, when you just want to pray—"...*the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak...*"—do you remember how Simon Peter, and James, and John fell asleep there in the garden when Jesus said, "...*watch and pray...*" (Matthew 26:41). They did not have the physical power, the physical stamina, the mental alertness, the concentration. There was not enough physical, spiritual, emotional strength to concentrate in prayer. There's just weakness.

Now, the Holy Spirit is the answer to that too. Look in Romans chapter 8, and verse 11: "*But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you*" (Romans 8:11).

Now, some people say this refers to the resurrection, and indeed one day we're going to be quickened by the Spirit in the resurrection, but there's nothing here that says this applies only to the resurrection. I want to tell you, there's something about being filled with the Holy Spirit that gives you energy. There's something about being filled with the Holy Spirit that gives concentration. There's something that is about being filled with the Holy Spirit that gives you power when you don't have power to pray, to overcome your impotence. "The Spirit of Him who raised up Jesus from the dead will dwell in your mortal bodies and quicken your mortal bodies."

I think a good illustration is this: remember when the Lord Jesus Christ was sitting there on that curbing of the well in Sychar? You remember there at Jacob's well and that Samaritan—I won't say lady—woman came out. You know the one that had been married so many times? If she lived today we'd give her an Academy Award, I suppose.

And, Jesus spoke to her. Jesus spoke to her about that water of life. And, do you remember Jesus was so tired? He was so weary. He was famished and His body was hungry. And, the disciples had gone into the city to get provisions and when they came back they found Jesus Christ absolutely invigorated, exhilarated, charged up. And, they said, “Here, you need something to eat.” He said, “*I have meat to eat that you know not of.*” (James 4:31–32). The Spirit of God had so energized that divine body of the Lord Jesus Christ and given Him strength.

And, I tell you sometimes when your spirit is flagging, sometimes when your mind cannot concentrate, sometimes when you’re weak—your will is so weak and you feel so impotent—cast yourself upon the Holy Spirit. Pray in the Spirit, not in the flesh. And, let me just add a word of practicality here, because sometimes we get so spiritual we don’t get practical. If you have trouble going to sleep when you pray, don’t try to do all your praying in bed. And, don’t kneel beside that big ’ol overstuffed chair and bury your face in a pillow. You’ll smother. That’s right. Sometimes when I have difficulty concentrating and praying—and I’m talking about being spiritual—but sometimes friend, I just get up and walk around and pray. Sometimes I can do my best praying in my study, just walking up and down. If you’d seen me, you’d think I was a hyena in a cage, but I’m going to get some blood flowing, get my mind thinking, get some air in my lungs. But, that’s a practical thing. But, above that, and beyond that, and beneath that, and through that shall be a dependence upon the Holy Spirit of God.

4. Interference

Now, let me tell you another enemy of our prayers that the Holy Spirit overcomes. And, it’s the enemy of interference, interference. And, I’m talking here about devilish, satanic interference. Remember James not only spoke to us about being sensitive to the Spirit, but James spoke to us about being steadfast against the devil. And, friend when you get on your knees and begin to pray, the devil levels all of the artillery of Hell against you. We said that this morning, I want to say it again. The devil will do anything he can do to keep you from praying. When Sidlow Baxter was here, Sidlow Baxter said something I shall never forget. He said that when a Christian goes to pray, the devil says to his demons, “Boys, stop him whatever you do, because if you stop him we can beat him every time. But, if you don’t stop him when he prays he’ll beat us every time.” And, the devil tries to stop us when we pray.

Well, how are you going to overcome the devil? You’re no match for the devil. You don’t have the strength to overcome the devil. There’s only one way that you’re going to overcome the devil and it is to pray in the Spirit.

I want us to leave the book of Romans for just one moment, but however we’re going back, so just keep your fingers in there and turn, if you will, to Ephesians chapter 6, Ephesians chapter 6. Now, here the Bible is speaking about our warfare. And, we are

in a war. So the Bible says in Ephesians chapter 6, beginning in verse 11: *“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”* (Ephesians 6:11–15).

Now, so far you’ve just been getting ready for the battle. So far you hadn’t fought a lick. So far all you’ve been doing is putting on the armor, now the battle begins. Look in verse 19: *“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints”* (Ephesians 6:18). God tells us of the armor, but God also tells of the warfare. And, I want to tell you that the Christian is in a warfare, and that war is won or lost on our knees, and on our face. And, when we come here on Sunday morning, we’re not coming here to do battle. We’re coming here just simply to pick up the spoils of the battle—the battle is won or lost by our prayers, by our prayers.

And, how are we going to overcome the devil? How are we going—listen you talk about interference, you try to pray, the phone will ring. You try to pray, the beans will burn. You try to pray, the kids will fight. You try to pray, and you’ll get a headache. You try to pray, your mind will be distracted. You try to pray, and a thousand and one things that you never thought of will happen. Amen? You know it’s true. Who is it does that? It’s the enemy. He does not want you to pray. And, so you’d better take the whole armor of God and pray in the Spirit. He is no match for the Holy Spirit of God. You cannot pray effectively in the flesh because of the interference of the devil.

5. Inexpressibility

Now, go back to Romans chapter 8 again. And, I’ll tell you, not only do we have the problem of indifference. And, not only do we have the problem of ignorance, and not only do we have the problem of impotence, and not only do we have the problem of interference, but we also have the problem of inexpressibility, inexpressibility.

There are times when we’re not able to say what we ought to say, what we need to say, what we want to say. There’s some times when our words just fail. There are times when we just feel damned up, and there are times when our vocabulary seems so inadequate. There are times when we want to praise, there are times when want to plead. There times when we want to come to God with our petition and we seem so unable to do it. Sometimes, within our bosoms there sighs that are too deep for words,

and we cannot express what's on our hearts. Thank God praying in the Spirit makes up for that. Look in verse 26: "*Likewise*"—Romans 8:26—"*Likewise the spirit also helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought but the Spirit himself maketh intercession with groaning that cannot be uttered*" (Romans 8:26). Ha, the Holy Spirit sometimes just takes my groanings, that I cannot even utter. Some people say, "Oh, praying in the Spirit is praying in tongues." No, that's not what it is. That's not what he's talking about. He's not talking about something that you utter, he's talking about something you can't utter. O God, God sometimes our heart is so full that it almost breaks. Sometimes a mother, a father, yearning over a child cannot even verbalize a prayer. Sometimes a person standing at the bed of a sick loved one, at a gravesite, has within him a force about to explode, and all he can do is just sigh, and cry and groan. Thank God the dear Holy Spirit of God knows how to take that prayer and make it acceptable. Take things that we cannot even utter, groanings that cannot be uttered. Oh, He takes care of our inexpressibility. Oh, who is the one doing the groaning? It's really the Holy Spirit within us who is groaning.

The Bible says, "He groans and He makes intercession for the saints" (Romans 8:26). This word *groaning* here is a word that expresses sounds that are uttered at childbirth. That's what the etymology of the word is. It speaks of the groanings. Have you ever heard the groanings of a mother about to give birth to a child? The agony, the pain, the groanings—but there's something about that groaning that's unique. There's something about the pain of childbirth that is absolutely unique, because it is pain, but linked with that pain is an intense desire to bring forth. It is pain that is transfigured by hope and expectation, and that's the deepest form of prayer. Pain, transfigured by hope and expectation as the Holy Spirit of God in us prays the prayer of agony. Thank God for the Holy Spirit who helps us to pray.

6. Inaccessibility

And, then not only is there the prayer of inexpressibility—or the problem of inexpressibility—but also there is the problem of inaccessibility, inaccessibility. You see, sometimes we just feel that our prayers are not getting through. That somehow when we pray, we don't come right into the throne room.

Now, through the blood of Jesus a way has been made through the veil into the holy of holies, and we have a right to come. But, dear friend, we need more than the right to come. We need also the power to come. The blood supplies the right to come, but the Spirit supplies the power to come. I want you to note this verse, Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 18. Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 18: "*For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father*" (Ephesians 2:18)—access, accessibility, how? By the Spirit, it is the dear Holy Spirit of God that takes us by the hand and leads us into the throne room.

Conclusion

Last summer we were in Taiwan, and I was invited to go with several other men to speak to one of the highest officials in the Taiwanese government. The son of General Chiang Kai-shek, who was in charge of all of the military forces there in the Republic of China. We were very honored to get to go. And, we had an invitation to go. And, then they took our passports and they did a security check on us. That gave us the right to come, but when we came to the gate of that palace there was a man there who escorted us in. We needed more than the right. We needed someone who would take us and lead us in. The Holy Spirit is the one who escorts us into the divine throne room of Almighty God and gives us that accessibility. Not only do I have a royal invitation, but dear friend, I have a palace attendant, the Holy Spirit to lead me right in to the presence of the one that I love so much. Right on through that iron curtain of sin, right on in to the holy of holies, by the blood of Jesus and by the aid of the Holy Spirit.

Now, that's why it's so important to pray in the Spirit, to pray in the spirit. But, now look, not only must we pray in the Spirit. You see, not only does the Holy Spirit have a ministry to us, but the Holy Spirit has a ministry to us in order that the Holy Spirit might have a ministry through us.

Very quickly now, because time is fleeting, I want you to notice this intercession of the Holy Spirit. Look, if you will, in just a moment, in verse 26. Romans 8, verse 26, and if I don't give the chapter from now on just assume it's Romans 8. All right, Romans 8:26, look at it, "*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us...*"—that is on our behalf. (Romans 8:26). But, now I want you to notice in verse 34 of this same chapter, "*Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us*" (Romans 8:34). The Holy Spirit makes intercession and Christ makes intercession.

But there's a difference. There's a difference into the places of these intercessions. Christ makes intercession at the right hand of the Father. The Holy Spirit makes intercession in us. There's a difference in the purpose of intercession. I am the object of the Savior's intercession. He's interceding for me at the right hand of the Father. But, I am the vehicle of the Spirit's intercession. He is interceding through me on behalf of others. You see, the Holy Spirit not only gives the ministry to me, but He gives a ministry *to* me so He can give a ministry *through* me so that the world can be reached. God wants to raise up a Church that knows how to intercede. I want to pastor that Church. A people who know how to pray, who know how to get hold of God, and I want to be that kind of a man so I can show you how to do it. So that the dear Holy Spirit of God will minister to us that He might minister through us, and that this city and this world might feel the impact of a Holy Church in the hands of a mighty God. Let us pray.

Resist the Devil and He Will Flee

By Adrian Rogers

Sermon Date: October 15, 1980

Main Scripture Text: James 4:7

Outline

Introduction

I. Satan Discredited God's Lavish Provision

II. Satan Denied God's Lawful Punishment

III. Satan Distorted God's Loving Purpose

Conclusion

Introduction

This message was given at the Bellevue Baptist Church Businessmen's Luncheon on October 2, 1908.

Turn to page 917, if you have your Bibles. And, you ought to have one, because there's one there on the table in front of you. And, feel free to use it; don't carry it away. Now, if you will remember, the last time we were together we were talking about dealing with temptation, and we said against the external foe, the world, that the key word is *faith*. "*This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*" (1 John 5:4) And then, we said against the internal foe, the flesh, the key word is *flight*. The Bible says, "*Flee...youthful lusts.*" (2 Timothy 2:22) But then, we said against the infernal foe, the devil, the key word is *fight*—F-I-G-H-T. Now, James has been talking to us about temptation, and he says here in James chapter 4 concerning the devil that—let me get just the verse I want here—in verse 7: "*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*" (James 4:7) Now, we're not told to run from the devil; we're told to "*resist the devil.*" (James 4:7) That's what I want us to think about. The last time we were together we were talking about resisting the devil, and we didn't get any further than just simply introducing the subject.

Now, let me say this about the devil: the devil is a liar. The biggest liar in Memphis, Tennessee, is not some politician; he's the devil. And, Jesus said concerning the devil in John chapter 8 and verse 44: Jesus was talking to the unsaved Pharisees, and He said to them, "*Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He*"—the devil—"was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:44) Two things Jesus told us about the devil: he's a

murderer and a liar. His motive is murder; his method is the lie. He's a murderer; he wants to bring death to you: death to purity, death to happiness, death to joy, physical death, spiritual death, eternal death.

The devil is a murderer, but how does the devil get his murdering done? His murder weapon is a lie; his method is the lie. He murders through lying. And, he is the master liar; he is the best liar. He is the father of all liars. Anybody who tells a lie is acting like the devil. And, because the devil is a master liar, he tells the cleverest lies, and the cleverest lies sound the most like the truth. As a matter of fact, if you're going to tell a lie, you've got to make it sound like the truth. And, we're going to study some of the devil's lies here together today, and I want you to see just how clever they are and how much truth they'll have mixed in them. Someone said, "Even a clock that won't run is right twice a day." And, the devil is a liar, and he mixes his lies in with things that sound so truthful.

Now, why does the devil use lies? Well, you see, the devil had rather get you to think a wrong thing than to do a wrong thing, because it is the thought that is the father of the deed. The Bible says, "*As [a man] thinketh, so is he.*" (Proverbs 23:7) So, you sow a thought; you reap a deed. You sow a deed, and you reap a habit. Sow a habit, and you reap a character. Sow a character, and you reap a destiny. And, it all begins with the thought. So, the devil is the liar; Jesus is the Truth. If the devil can get you to believe a lie, he's got you.

Now remember, he is the master liar; he is the father liar, and his best lies sound so much like the truth. Now, let me say something else about the devil as a liar: not only is he the father of all liars and, therefore, the best liar, and not only do his lies sound the most like the truth because they're clever lies, but he lies about the biggest subjects. Now, if he's the biggest liar, he'd have to lie about the biggest subject, and the biggest subject is God. And, if you can believe the devil's lies about God, the devil has you—one hundred percent. Now, we're just gonna look in James 4:7 for just a moment; it says, "*Resist the devil.*" (James 4:7) And then, we're just gonna go all over the Bible thinking about how to resist him. But primarily, I want us to be in two books this morning other than James—or this afternoon or whatever it is—this noontime.

First of all, the book of Revelation: Genesis chapter—excuse me, the book of Genesis—chapter 3, and then the book of the Revelation, chapter 12. Those two books I want us to see, because in Genesis chapter 3, we see Satan's deceit and in Revelation chapter 12, we're gonna see Satan's defeat. And, I want us to turn now to Genesis chapter 3, if we will for just a moment. Remember, we're talking about the devil's lies and how to resist them. And so, in Genesis chapter 3, you're gonna find the devil's big three—the three great big lies of Satan.

Now, here they are—Genesis chapter 3, beginning in verse 1: "*Now the serpent was*

more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.” (Genesis 3:1–6) Now, I want you to notice Satan’s deceit; I want you to notice three things that he did to Eve that he’d like to do to you.

I. Satan Discredited God’s Lavish Provision

The first thing that he did was to discredit God’s lavish provisions—to discredit God’s lavish provision. God had placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and it was indescribably beautiful. And, they had everything that heart could wish for; every need was supplied. God had lavishly provided for Adam and Eve, and they were able to live in this state of lavish provision until sin came along.

There’s a story that tells about Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve after they were expelled from the Garden, went and looked over a high wall, and they saw the Garden of Eden. They came back to their daddy and said, “Daddy, we’ve seen the most beautiful place. You won’t believe it, Daddy. There are grapes, and figs, and pomegranates, and waterfalls. Oh, Daddy, there are flowers. It’s beautiful! You think we could ever live in a place like that, Daddy?” And, Adam said, “We did once, Son, before your mother ate us out of house and home.”

Now, the Garden of Eden was indescribably beautiful. And, God had provided all of this for Adam and Eve. But now, I want you to notice what the devil said. Look in Genesis chapter 3, verse 1: *“Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”* (Genesis 3:1) Now, is that what God said? Indeed, it wasn’t what God said. If you want to see what God said rather than the devil’s lie, turn back to Genesis chapter 2, verse 16—and here’s what God said: *“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat.”* (Genesis 2:16) Now, notice what the devil said: the devil said, *“Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”* (Genesis 3:1) Notice what God said of every tree of the garden: *“Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it.”* (Genesis 2:16–17)

There was only one tree that God said they should not eat of, but what did the devil do? The devil discredited all of God's lavish provisions for Adam and Eve.

Now, what was he really trying to do? Think with me for a minute—with me a minute, gentlemen. What the devil was trying to do was simply this: he wanted Eve to think negatively about God. Now, if the devil can get you thinking negatively about God, he has you. If the devil can get you to believing that God is not good, if he can discredit God's lavish provisions in your eyes...

Sirs, I wanna tell you that God is good. Now, the devil doesn't want you to believe that. Do you know that most of us run from God? And, in order for God to save us, He has to catch us. And, if He couldn't run faster than we can run, none of us would've ever been saved. He actually, literally has to run us down in order to save us, and why is that? Because we've been taught to think negatively about God. Most of us think of God as some sort of a cosmic killjoy—that every time He sees somebody having a good time, that He moves in to break up the party; and everything that is good is illegal, immoral, or fattening; everything is a no-no, and God doesn't want you to do it. But, the truth of the matter is that God does want you to enjoy life. The truth of the matter is that God has said a resounding “yes” to your pleasure.

And, I want you to get this, and get it in your heart and get it down good. Listen to these verses. Psalms 37 and verse 4: *“Delight thyself also in the LORD: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.”* (Psalms 37:4) Listen to Psalms 84, verse 11: *“the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”* (Psalms 84:11) Or, listen to this—1 Timothy chapter 6 and verse 17: *“[It is] God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.”* (1 Timothy 6:17) Now, God gave Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden *“richly all things”* (1 Timothy 6:17), and He wanted them to enjoy them. God loves you. God wants the desires of your heart met. God wants you to have pleasure. God wants you to have peace. God wants you to have prosperity. But, the devil wants you to think negatively about God. *“Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”* (Genesis 3:1) That isn't what God said. God said, “Of the fruit of this garden, you may freely eat. I made it for you. Help yourself.” (Genesis 2:16)

Now, you see, if we think negatively about God, then we're going to fear God. I saw a boy the other day in the supermarket—he was wearing a T-shirt, and on the front of it, it said, “God will get ya for that.” And, I don't know what he's talking about, but now that's the kind of a God that he had—you know, that God is somewhere up there lurking in the shadows, waiting for somebody to enjoy life just a little bit and to move in. Now, you say, “But didn't God say that we should not commit adultery?” Sure. “Didn't you say that God said, *‘Thou shalt not kill?’*” (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17) Sure. There are a lot of “thou shalt not's” in the Bible. But, *every time God says, “Thou shalt not,” He just*

simply says, “Don’t hurt yourself,” and every time God says, “Thou shalt,” He’s saying, “Help yourself to happiness.” You see, God doesn’t need anything. He has it all, friend. These laws are not for His benefit; they’re for your benefit. God loves you, and He has a very wonderful plan for your life. And, if the devil can get you to thinking negatively about God, he has you.

I’ve been preaching the gospel for a long time. There are two things I’ve never heard. Number one: I’ve never heard a real, true Christian say, “I’m sorry I gave my heart to Jesus Christ.” And, number two: I’ve never heard who’s not a Christian say, “I want to tell you how much the dear, sweet, old devil means to me.” Now, the devil would like for you, however, to think negatively about God and to think that somehow God is holding out on you. *“Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”* (Genesis 3:1)

II. Satan Denied God’s Lawful Punishment

But, now look, notice this: not only did he discredit God’s lavish provisions, but right on the heel of that he denied God’s lawful punishment—he denied God’s lawful punishment. Look in the next verse here in Genesis chapter 3: *“And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden”—she knew better—“But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die.”* (Genesis 3:2–4) Now, I really believe this is the way He said, “Surely not”: “Surely not.” I believe that’s just exactly the sneer that was in his voice: *“Ye shall not surely die.”* (Genesis 3:4) So, not only did he deny or discredit God’s lavish provisions; he denied God’s lawful punishment. You see, since God is not good, His word is not to be trusted. And so, here, the devil is very suddenly moving Eve away from her relationship with God. First of all, a doubt—*“hath God said”* (Genesis 3:1)—and then a denial, *“Ye shall not surely die.”* (Genesis 3:4)

But, I want to tell you, dear friend, that just as I’ve said that God is a good God, I also want to tell you that God is a holy God. Now, the devil doesn’t want you to believe either of those two things; he wants you to think negatively about God, on the one hand, and yet, on the other hand... And, both truths are somehow—or both lies are somehow—contradictory, but that doesn’t make any difference with liars. He wants you to think, on the one hand, that God is harsh, and cruel, and straight-laced, but on the other hand, he wants you to think that God is soft on sin, that God will let sin get by, that God is too good to punish sin. I wanna tell you, God is too good not to punish sin. If you had to get one word that would describe God—one word that would epitomize or characterize God—it would have to be not... Or, contrary to popular opinion, it would not be love; it would be the word *holy*. God is a holy God, and that means that God is

the complete other, the antithesis, the opposite of sin. It means that God must punish sin. You know what they say in a court of law? That when a guilty man is acquitted, the judge is condemned. If God knowingly, willingly, deliberately lets sin go unpunished, God would cease to be a Holy God.

Now, God does punish sin. Now, we think somehow He has no right to do that—He's un-American if He does that. And, I have this feeling—it's more than a feeling; it's a conviction—that *if the Supreme Court of the United States of America could vote on it, they would outlaw hell as cruel and unusual punishment*. They would say that God has no right to do that—it's somehow unconstitutional and un-American. But, I want to tell you that God does punish sin. Now, don't believe the devil's lies. The devil, on the one hand, will discredit God's lavish provision and make you think that God is not loving and kind. On the other hand, he will discredit God's lawful punishment and make you think that you can sin with impunity and get away with it.

III. Satan Distorted God's Loving Purpose

Now, the third thing he did to Eve—not only did he discredit God's lavish provision and deny God's lawful punishment, but he distorted God's loving purpose. Notice in verse 5—this is his rationale for the whole thing: *“For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods”*—literally, “as God”—*“knowing good and evil.”* (Genesis 3:5) Now, what he said to her is, “Eve, if you keep on going the same way you're going—if you keep on living in the narrow confines of God's will—you will never, ever fully express yourself; you'll never, ever reach your potential. Now Eve, you ought to participate in this sin, because baby, your eyes are not even open. You're like a babe in the woods. You haven't experienced anything yet.” Why, he's saying, “Try it. You might like it. If you don't like it, you don't have to do it any more. But how do you know that it's bad? How do you know that it's wrong? After all, all you've got is the Word of God, and isn't personal experience more valid than the Word of God? Don't knock it, baby, 'til you've tried it. And then, after you've tried it—after your eyes are open—then you'll know and then you can be the judge. Nobody else has to judge for you. After all, Eve, you've got a mind; use it. Just try it, and once your eyes are open and once you know for yourself the difference between good and evil, from there on you'll be able to choose, because experience is the best teacher.”

And, I want to tell you, sir, when it comes to sin, experience is the worst teacher. The deeper man goes into sin, the less he knows about sin. There's something about sin that stultifies the mind and stupefies the mind and keeps a man from understanding. When it comes to sin, the Word of God, not experience, is the best teacher. You see, the idea was for her to get in and experiment around a little bit: “I mean, after all, Eve, you just go through life once. Grab all the gusto you can. And, you try it, and if you like

it, fine; and if you don't like it, fine." But, you see, he says, "Eve, when you do this, then your mind will be the sum total of what is right and wrong. No longer will you have some God out there telling you what to do; you'll be your own god. You will be like God, because after all, isn't God the One who says what's right? Isn't God the One who says what's wrong? Now you can set yourself up as your own little tin god, and you can say what is right and what is wrong. Why, Eve, you'll be like God."

Now, here's the reason I said he distorted God's loving purpose, because here is the irony of the whole thing: when God made man, He made him to be like Himself. You see, God created man in his own image. That's why God made us—it's to be like Him. And, when the Lord Jesus Christ is finished with us, we're going to be like Him. The Bible says God is working all things together for our good that we might "*be conformed to the image of [God's] Son.*" (Romans 8:29) And, I can say with the psalmist, "*[I'll] be satisfied, when I [awaken], with thy likeness.*" (Psalms 17:15) But, isn't it ironic that the devil took God's purpose and distorted it? Remember what I said—that the cleverest lie sounds the most like the truth. Now, you see, God's aim and God's plan for us is not to be as God, but to be like God. Now, the devil said, "You be as God," but God wants us to be like Him, not as Him. You see, it was the devil's burning ambition to replace God: "*I will be like the most High*" (Isaiah 14:14)—"*I will exalt my throne above the stars of God,*" (Isaiah 14:13) he said.

And so, so, here was the devil saying to Eve, "Now Eve, if you'll just listen to me, I'll make you your own God; I'll make you godly, but just do it my way, not God's way." And so, you need to understand this about the temptation in the Garden of Eden: it wasn't a temptation to fall down; it was a temptation to fall up. It wasn't a temptation to be ungodly; it was a temptation to be godly, but just to do it the devil's way—not real godliness, false godliness; a pseudo-godliness that comes from a distortion of God's loving purpose.

Conclusion

Now, I want you to review with me now for just a few moments, because I know I'm not gonna get to the last part of this message. We talked today about Satan's deceit, and next Thursday we'll talk about Satan's defeat. But, I want you to see how deceitful he is.

And, think with me again—what did he do, first of all? He discredited God's lavish provisions: "*Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of [the fruit of] every tree of the garden?*" (Genesis 3:1) He wanted Adam and Eve to think negatively about God. I want you to leave this luncheon today thinking positively about God. God is good, and God's will, sir, is not something that you have to do; it's something that you get to do. *God's will for you is what you would choose for yourself and what you would want for yourself if you had enough sense to want it.* God loves you very much, and never think negatively

about God. *“The LORD God is a sun and [a] shield...[and] no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”* (Psalms 84:11) If it will make you healthy, happy, wholesome, and holy, God says, “Help yourself.” God enjoys you enjoying life. *“Delight [yourself] in the LORD...[he’ll] give [you] the desires of [your] heart.”* (Psalms 37:4) Don’t think negatively about God. If you do, you’ll find yourself from God. The devil discredits God’s lavish provisions.

The second thing he does—he denies God’s lawful punishment: *“Ye shall not surely die.”* (Genesis 3:4) But friend, if you choose to go your own independent way—if you turn your back on God and follow the devil—just as sure as there is a man standing on this platform named Adrian Rogers, just as surely as life itself, you’re going to die. *“The wages of sin is death.”* (Romans 6:23) *“The soul that sinneth, it shall [surely] die.”* (Ezekiel 18:4, 20) And, there’s nothing that a holy God—a loving God—can do to keep you out of hell. The devil denies God’s lawful punishment.

And then, the worst thing of all—he distorts God’s loving purpose to make you want to be your own little cheap tin God, to become the sum and the substance of what is right or wrong, and to enter into some sort of a system of philosophy that some people have given all kinds of names to. But, the bottom line is you just become your own little god: you decide what is right and wrong rather than the Word of God deciding what is wrong—right or wrong; you just sort of have a situational ethic about it. And, if you do that, then you become your own little god and you miss God’s purpose (that you might become one with Him)—not as God, but like God; godly; sharing the character and the nature of your Father who is in heaven.

Now, this is the devil’s deceit—the devil’s distortions. Now, next week, we’re going to study this verse of Scripture: *“And they overcame him”—the devil—“by the blood of the Lamb...by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.”* (Revelation 12:11) And, we’ll find out how to handle the devil, and we’ll think a little bit about the devil’s defeat in place of the devil’s deceit.

Let’s bow together for prayer. Thank you, Father, for this little study from your Word today. Lord, it has spoken to my own heart anew and afresh, and I’m thankful, Lord, that Brother James has told us that we can *“resist the devil, and he will flee from [us].”* (James 4:7) Lord, I’m grateful that your Word has told us about this very clever liar, and Lord, just understanding his lies has helped us today to be able to stand against him and not to believe a falsehood, because, Lord, we know to believe the wrong thing will ultimately cause us to do the wrong thing. We love you, and praise you, and bless you, Lord. We thank you for one another and for our fellowship in Jesus. In His dear name. Amen.

How to Face Your Future

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: January 1, 1995

Main Scripture Text: James 4:13–17

“For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.”

JAMES 4:15

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Mistake of Godless Planning
 - A. Confession
 - B. Consecration
 - C. Concentration
- II. The Mistake of Dangerous Presumption
- III. The Mistake of Tragic Procrastination

Conclusion

Introduction

I'm going to speak to you today on this subject: How to Face Your Future. Now, Americans are obsessed with the future. We want to know what's in store for us. So if you read the newspapers today, or listen to the radio, there will be plenty of prophets, and pundits, and prognosticators who are going to tell us about the future. It's amazing how people try to learn about the future. Some look in tea leaves, or some go to soothsayers. We call them today fortunetellers, and, by the way, they are all of the devil. Some are so foolish as to read the pages of the astrologer, trying to look into the future. Others are different. They bring their intellect, and their intuition, their minds, and they say, "Well, this is what has happened. These are the trends I see, and this is what shall happen."

I listened to a group last night called the Capital Gang. I watched it on CNN, and they were talking about what the year is going to be, who are going to be the candidates for the presidency, ta da da da da da. And with all of their wit and wisdom, they were forecasting the future. Some people, maybe, they study books like Megatrends, or whatever. We all want to know the future. There's only one who knows the future, and that's God. Put it down big, plain, and straight. But whether we know the future or not, we have a future that we must face.

I would like for you to take God's Word, and turn to James chapter four, and I'm

going to begin reading in verse thirteen, because here's a passage that deals with the future. It tells the story of a man. He was a first-century wheeler-dealer. He was a businessman, and he was planning his future. And we're going to find the story, and in the story we're going to find three great mistakes that he made. We're going to learn from those mistakes, and we're going to learn how to face the future, not only as a church, but for your family, and for you as an individual.

Now, here's James chapter four, verse thirteen: Go to now, ye that say, today or tomorrow we will enter into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then—poof—it vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. Now, here's the story of a man who made three tragic mistakes in the first century, and he has plenty of brothers in the twentieth century.

I. The Mistake of Godless Planning

Now here are the three mistakes that he made. Number one: He made the mistake of what I want to call Godless planning—Godless planning. Here's a man who's planning, and he's sitting down. He's a businessman, so he's thinking about how he's to run his business. First of all, he gets out his calendar, and he plans the period of time. He says, "Today or tomorrow." He looks at his calendar, and he says, "I could do that today, or I could do this tomorrow." And so, he considers the time, and the period of time, and so forth—a wise thing to do.

And then, he not only considers the period, but he considers the place. He puts up his calendar, and he gets down his maps. And he begins to look at the maps, and make his charts of the various cities, and so forth. He says, "Ah, huh, that's the city I want to go to. I will enter into such a city." And then, not only does he plan the period, and the place, but he also plans the procedure. He's saying, "I want to be a merchandiser. I'm going to buy, and I'm going to sell." Evidently, he knows a good supply, and also he also knows a good market. Maybe he has a degree in marketing from the University of Jerusalem.

He's a smart man. And so he figures the procedure. He knows how he's going to do it. And then he also, like any businessman, he looks at the bottom line. He considers the profit. I will buy. I will sell. And I'll sell for more than I buy for. I'll get gain. I'll make a profit. So he's already counting up the shekels. He's already counting the profit. He is planning—planning shrewdly, evidently, planning well. But he's made a tragic mistake. Did you notice it? There's no mention of God. He doesn't take God into his consideration at all. Verse 15 says that he did not say, if it is God's will, I will live and do

this or that. He has not considered the will of God. And that is tragic. That is sinful. That is prideful. That is, as a matter of fact, it's arrogant.

Now an atheist is a fool. The Bible says clearly and plainly, the fool hath said in his heart there is no God. Isn't that what the Bible says? But come up here and let me tell you something. The biggest fool is not the man who says there is no God. There's yet a bigger fool, and that's the man who says, "There is a God," and then doesn't live like it. Isn't that true? And there are many like that. Oh yes, they admit the fact of God theoretically, but they live their lives as though Jesus Christ never lived, never died, never rose again, when, as Laurie sang "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all," they take their life, their soul, their all; they take their own mind; they take their own wit, their own ambition, their own arrogance, and they plan their lives. Have you done that? Are you endeavoring to do that? What a mistake that would make. You see, the word life—L-I-F-E—if you look in the middle of the word life, there are two little letters—I-F—if, if. If the Lord wills, we shall do this or that. So many of us make our plans, and then say, "Lord, here are my plans. Would you please bless what I'm doing?" when we

really ought to be saying, "Lord, help me to do what you are blessing. What is it, Lord, that you want me to do?"

Now, as you face 1995, I want to tell you clearly and plainly that God has already a plan for your life—God does. The Bible says clearly that the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord. And we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, unto good works, which God has foreordained for us to walk in them. It's God's plan. Let me give you some verses, perhaps for your margin, that will show you clearly that God has a plan for your life. For example, one of my favorites is in Psalm 32, and verse eight. God said, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way that thou shalt go." Isn't that a great promise? Isn't it? I will instruct and teach thee in the way thou shalt go. I will guide thee with mine eye. That is, His guidance is going to be the kind of guidance that looks over you, looks ahead of you, and looks you in the face, so that you might know God's will.

It'd be a shame for you to miss God's plan. Isaiah chapter 30 and verse 21 says, and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way; walk ye in it. The Bible says, in Romans 8, verse 14, as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. So, you don't need to be floundering around in the darkness like a ship without a rudder or a compass on a dark and stormy night. And you don't need to come to the end of your life and say, as one said, "Youth a mistake, manhood a struggle, old age a regret." God has a plan for you. God has a plan for your education, for your business, for your family, for your marriage.

A. Confession

Let me give you three words that will just help you, and I'm going to make this

exceeding simple. But if you want to know God's will for your life for this year, if you want to put verse fifteen into practice and say, "I want God's will," the very first word is the word confession. Confess every known sin. Get the sin out of your life. When you pray for guidance, if you're still harboring sin in your life, you will not have that guidance. The Bible says, in Psalm 66 and verse 18, if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. Yet again the Bible says, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

There's no reason that you should not start this year absolutely, totally clean—whiter than snow. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. But if you don't confess your sin, God will not give you leadership.

Here's a verse that's a frightening verse. It's Ezekiel 14 and verse three. Listen to it: Son of man, these men have set up idols in their heart. Now what is an idol? What is an idol? You say, "Well, it's something you make out of sticks and stones and bow down and worship." Maybe, but not always. Americans have idols. They're made of fiberglass and stainless steel, and plastic, and metal, and so forth. They're the things that we worship. Anything that you love more, fear more, serve more, or honor more than God is an idol in your life, whatever it is. It can be your family. It can be your business. It could be your recreation. But listen to it. These men have set up idols in their heart, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face. When you have an idol, you have something in your life that you're going to stumble over.

And then, God said, "Should I be inquired of at all of them?" Now, what does that mean? When you have an idol in your life, forget about asking God to lead you. He's not going to lead you. These men have set up idols in their lives. They've built a stumbling block for themselves. And God said, "Why should they ask me? Why should they ask me for guidance?" The very first thing you need to do is to confess every sin, and put away every idol. So the first word is what? Confession.

B. Consecration

Now, here's the second word. It's consecration. Not only must you get the sin out of your life; you must get the stubbornness out of your life. The Bible says, if in all of our ways we acknowledge him, he will direct our paths. Now, what that means is to say, "Lord God, I acknowledge your right to rule over my life. And not only is there no sin; there's no stubbornness. God, I want, I desire your will, whatever it is you want me to do, when you want me to do it, any time; what you want me to do, anything; where you want me to do it, any place. Lord, I am yours to command." Have you done that? I mean, say, have you done that? That's not a rhetorical question. That's an honest question, straight to your heart. Have you done that? Have you really? Have you said, "Lord, I want your will, nothing else, any cost, any place, any time—your will, dear

God?” Have you signed the contract at the bottom, and asked God to fill it in? God’s will is not for rebels. Confession, consecration—I am yours, Lord. Here I am. I’m reporting for duty. Whatever it is you want me to do, Lord, I’m under your control. I am a man, a woman, under orders.

C. Concentration

Here’s the third thing, and very simple. Just these three things: confession, consecration, and concentration. Are you listening to God? Now the Bible says you’ll hear a voice behind you. Are you listening to that voice? God says, “I will guide you with my eye.” Are you looking into the face of God? Can you see the expression on the face of God spiritually? Is God’s face towards you? Well, God’s face will be toward you, if your face is toward God. God’s voice will be in your ear, if your ear is in tune to God’s voice. Sometimes people say, “You know why is it that God is not leading me? I’ve done what you’ve said, Pastor. I’ve confessed every known sin. I’ve done what you’ve said, Pastor. I’ve yielded my life, and I’ve said, “O God, I desire to do thy will.” One more thing: are you listening to God? Are you tuning your ear to God? Do you have a quiet time? I say, do you? It may not be that God is not speaking. It might be that you’re not listening. Or you may be even praying, but your prayer is not a listening prayer. You’re saying, “Lord, listen, your servant is speaking,” rather than, “Speak, Lord, your servant hears.” Are you listening to God? Have you ever been listening to the radio and then turned the radio off? Do you think the music stops when you turn the radio off? The music is still there, but you just simply don’t hear it, because you’ve turned it off. And God may be speaking, but you may not be listening. If you’ll take those three things—confession, consecration, and concentration—and play them out, you will know the will of God for your life, and God will say, “This is my way for you, my child; walk in it.” Now, He’s not going to give you a road map as much as He is a relationship, and, day by day, you’ll know His will.

II. The Mistake of Dangerous Presumption

Now, here’s a second mistake this man made. First of all, the very first mistake that he made was this Godless planning. The second mistake he made was dangerous presumption. Look, if you will again, in verse fifteen: For that ye ought to say if the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that. This man presumed that he had tomorrow. He said, today or tomorrow. But God said, “You may be very foolish to plan for tomorrow.” He said, “What is your life but it’s like a vapor. And the word for vapor is the word atmos—A-T-M-O-S. It’s the word we get atmosphere from. Your life is like your breath that falls on a cold day and then disappears. Your life is like a mist rising over a pond that evaporates as the sun comes up. The Bible says your life is like a leaf that fades. Your life is like the flower of the grass that withers. It’s here today and it’s gone tomorrow.

Don't boast yourself about tomorrow. Not a one of us today in the threshold of this New Year knows that we will see another new year. Oh, how life is so fragile, and how life is so brief. Even when you say, "Well, Pastor, I'm young, and I'm in good health," the Bible says there is but a step between me and death. You step out from behind a parked car and another one hits you, and you're gone, just like that.

This may be the last step I'll ever take. You say, "Well, Pastor, you look very healthy." Yes, but what if an airplane comes through that roof? I don't know. You don't know. What is your life, but a vapor that appeareth for a little while? There is but a step, there is but a heartbeat, between you and hell, if you don't know the Lord Jesus Christ, between you and heaven, if you know the Lord Jesus. When you were conceived in your mother's womb, your little heart began to beat. Some people came by my house this week and said, "Pastor, wonderful news—we've conceived! We're going to have a child!" And that daddy said, "I heard the heart beat." That's not just a blob of protoplasm. That's a little baby in there, a little beating heart. That heart begins to beat in the mother's womb. Then that little baby is born, and it begins to eat that food, and run, and play, and skip on the playground. That little heart beats, and begins to beat stronger and stronger with exercise. The little heart is beating. Then that boy grows to be a teenager. One day in the schoolroom, he looks across the schoolroom and he sees that very special girl. That heart begins to beat that way, and he falls in love, and he gets married, and he begins to raise his children, and then he has some grandchildren. That heart is just beating, and then one day it kind of beats irregularly. He goes to see the doctor, who says, "Well, you've got a little problem in there. We'll give you some medicine, put a pacemaker in there." And he gets to do pretty good, and then, after a while, it gets to beat wrong again. And he goes to the doctor, and the doctor says, "Well, we're going to change the medicine." Feels pretty good, and one day goes to wake him: he doesn't wake, not beating anymore. "Well," you say. "Pastor, you know, that's the way I want to go. I just want to die in my sleep like that. I just want to put on my pajamas and just not wake up." But you know something, friend? Sometimes that heartbeat stops in a mother's womb. Sometimes it stops on the playground. Sometimes it stops on the football field. Sometime it stops in heavy traffic, on the way home from work. Sometimes it stops in the vigor of young manhood. Sometimes the youth must quit his parties. Somebody must lay aside his or her toys.

What is your life, but a vapor? Poof, it's gone. Don't presume upon tomorrow. Don't say, "I've got this coming year to live." You do not know, and, therefore, our Lord says, "Take no thought for tomorrow. The morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof, and today is the only day you've got. Listen to me. Tomorrow never comes, because when you get to it, it's always today. Isn't that true? It's the only day you ever have. Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow is a time only on the

fool's calendar. Jesus said, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. This is the day the Lord hath made. I will rejoice and be glad in it. And this is the only day you have, and only God knows if you've got all of this one. So live this day for the glory of God. And our Lord said there are two days that can take away the strength from today—one is yesterday, and the other is tomorrow, and often today is crucified between those two thieves.

Paul said, in Philippians chapter three, we are to forget those things which are behind. And what are some things you are to forget on this New Year's Day? Forget your past guilt. Now, I don't mean, overlook it. I mean, bury it in the grave of God's forgetfulness. God says, "Their iniquities will I remember against them no more." And the Bible says, "If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." And you, dear friend, get clean today, and be clean.

Past guilt, past grief. Has this past year been a hard year for you? Why don't you give those sorrows to Jesus? Give them to Jesus, and unhook yourself from them. Past grudges: has somebody done you wrong? Well, turn them over to the Lord, and unhook yourself from them. And put in your heart a spirit of forgiveness. And don't go nursing a grudge into the New Year. And past glory: Was last year a good year for you? Well, that's gone.

When I played football, we'd have a good game. We'd come next time to our practice, and the coach would say, "Fellows, we're playing again next Saturday. Put away your press clippings. That other team hasn't read them." Friend, that's gone. Your guilt, your grief, your grudges, your glory—that's in the past. Forget those things. This is the day the Lord hath made. And our Lord says, "Don't worry about tomorrow." He says, "Take no anxious thought for the morrow. The morrow will take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day"—is what?—"the evil thereof." God will give you sufficient evil. Who gives it to you? Who gives it to you? God gives it to you. Why does God give you evil? Not sin—evil. That means heartache, suffering, toil, pain, pain, moan, groan, woe. God is up there in heaven, mixing that up and giving it to you. You said, "I thought God was a good God." He is a good God, and that's why He does it. The worst thing that could happen to you and to me would be to live this life without any pain, without any sorrow, without any heartache, without any difficulty.

With our sinful natures, we would never call upon God, so God gives us sufficient evil. And then God gives us sufficient grace. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Sufficient what? Evil. Sufficient what? Grace. God causes me to have to come to Him, and then gives me grace. And that is the marvelous, divine ecology that God has given me for today, to live today looking to God. And the Bible says, "As your days are, so shall your strength be."

Now, what happens when you worry? You bring tomorrow's problems into today. God gave you sufficient strength for today's problems. He did not give you sufficient strength for tomorrow's problems. So when you bring tomorrow's problems into today, that doesn't help you get ready for tomorrow. It doesn't take the trouble out of tomorrow. It takes the gladness out of today. You, today, are overloaded, overburdened, trying to handle tomorrow's problems today. And when you get to tomorrow, you get to tomorrow out of breath, because you've been carrying a load that you've never been meant to carry. Day by day, He will sustain you. Every step you take, God will take care of you, day by day. Take no thought for tomorrow. Worry is the interest you pay on borrowed trouble. That is tomorrow. You live today trusting the Lord. What is your life, but even a vapor that appears for a little while, and then vanishes away? And on this threshold of a new year, don't plan without God. Take God into your plans. And don't presume upon tomorrow. Say, "If the Lord will, I shall live, and do this or that." And live today like it may be your last day. And say, "This is the day the Lord hath made. We will rejoice and be glad in it."

III. The Mistake of Tragic Procrastination

Now, here's a third mistake that the man made. First of all, there was Godless planning; secondly, presumption, where he's simply presuming that he knows what's going to happen. The third thing is tragic procrastination. Look, if you will, in verses sixteen and seventeen: But now ye rejoice in your boastings. All such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin. Have you ever thought that if you simply knew the will of God, everything would be wonderful? I know a lot of folks who know the will of God, who don't do it. You see. It's not enough to know God's will. It's twice tragic if you know the will of God, and do not do it. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him—to him—it is sin. It is a greater sin to fail to do what you ought to do, than to do what you ought not to do. Because if you are doing what you ought to do, you cannot be doing what you ought not to do. And, therefore, the sins of omission are greater than the sins of commission. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, sinful procrastination. You say, "Now, Lord, I know what I ought to do, and one of these days I am going to do it."

Procrastination is another word for rebellion. It is sin against God. And, if you will, think of all problems that procrastination has brought about in your life and in my life. Procrastination is the reason that some people are lost. What does a man have to do? Sit in an auditorium like this and hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. What does he have to do—curse God, blaspheme God, refused to be saved, say, "I'll never be saved"? No, just simply postpone salvation. Second Corinthians chapter 6 and verse two says, "Behold, now is the accepted time. Behold, now is the day of salvation." A man is not

lost today because he lies, or steals, or commits adultery, or is proud—because those sins have been paid for. The Bible says, “He that believeth on him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already,” not because he lies, not because he steals, not because he commits adultery. He is condemned already because he hath not believed. You see it’s the sin of procrastination, just simply failing to do what you ought to do, that condemns and sends souls to hell. So many today—of course there are those who have never heard, but we’re not talking about those. We’re talking about those who know to do good, and they do it not.

You sit in this auditorium, and I tear my heart out and beg you to be saved. And you say, “I will be saved, but not today.” That, my friend, is sin. One day, you may die and go to hell, and it’ll be everlastingly too late. Procrastination, the sin of omission, is why so many marriages break up. What do you have to do to harm your marriage? Do you have to beat your wife, curse her? No, just fail to nurture and love her. A woman said to her husband, “Why don’t you tell me that you love me?” He said, “Look, when we got married, I told you I loved you. If I change my mind, I’ll let you know.” People are like that. Love is not like a diamond that you have to treasure. Love is like a flower that must be watered, and cultivated, and cared for. You don’t fall in love; you grow in love. And you need to verbalize, and visualize, and vitalize that love. It’s the reason that so many of us have wrong thoughts in our head. It’s the sin of omission. You say, “Pastor, I’m having difficulty. I’m having difficulty. I cannot think the right thoughts. I have all kinds of bad thoughts in my mind.” Do you know why? Because you haven’t got good thoughts in your mind. It’s just that simple. God engineered you, and God made you where you can’t think two thoughts at one time. And if you’re thinking what’s right, you can’t be thinking what is wrong. Therefore, the Bible says, “Whatsoever things are pure, just, lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things.” Load up on the Word of God. To him that knoweth to good and doeth it not, to him it is sin. It is the sin of omission that is the great sin.

Do you know why churches fail today? Not because people fight the churches, not because they oppose the church. That only causes some churches to grow. The great enemy of the church is the neglect of her own members. For example, tonight we’ll be having an evening service, and some of you will not be here. Why? Well, you have something else you’d rather do. You neglect the worship service. Did you know that, when you don’t attend a service, that’s a vote to close the doors? If everybody voted as you voted, there’d be no service that night. Did you know if everybody prayed like you pray, or gave like you give, or witnessed like you witness, the church may succeed, or the church may go out of business? You see, it is neglect. To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin. Godless planning, prideful presumption, sinful procrastination, three big enemies that can keep you from being what you ought to be

this coming year.

Conclusion

Are you saved? Joe Henry Hankins pastored in Texas and in Arkansas. He was a mighty preacher. Joe Henry Hankins said that on an occasion he had a woman who was the wife of a successful businessman, very much like this businessman. That woman got saved. Hankins, a wise pastor, thought it'd be a good time for the husband to get saved. So he went on Saturday afternoon to visit the husband. The wife was going to be baptized that Sunday night. They had a cordial talk. Joe Henry Hankins took his New Testament, presented the cause of Christ to that businessman, and asked that businessman if he would give his heart to our Lord, and be saved. The businessman thought for a while, and he said, "Dr. Hankins," he said, "my wife is going to be baptized tomorrow night." He said, "What you say is right. I need to be saved, and tomorrow morning when the invitation is given, I'll come down that aisle, give you my hand, and give my heart to Jesus." Hankins said, "That is great. That is wonderful." And he closed his New Testament, put it in his pocket, and thought, God has won a victory today.

And as he got to the door of that rich man's house, put his hand upon the doorknob, the Holy Spirit spoke to the pastor. He knew something was not right. He went back, and he said, "But, sir, why don't you give your heart to Jesus now, and then come tomorrow morning and let the people know that you've given your heart to Jesus? Let's get it settled right now." You know what that businessman said? He said, "Preacher, I'm an honest man. I'm a good businessman. And, when I give my word, my word is my bond. You can count on it. I'll be down that aisle tomorrow morning, give my heart to Jesus Christ." Preacher thought again, "Well, a victory's been won. Praise God."

He started, the second time he put his hand on the doorknob, the Holy Spirit said, "Preacher, there is something not right." Hankins said, "I knew it. I got my New Testament, and I went back to that man, and I opened my New Testament to 2 Corinthians chapter 6 and verse two, and I said, "Sir, forgive my presumption, but would you read this verse?" And that businessman read it. Behold now is the accepted time. Behold now is the day of salvation. And the preacher said, "Who wrote that?" The businessman said, "God wrote it." He said, "When does God say you're to be saved?" "Oh," he said, "God says now." Then he said, "If somebody said tomorrow, would it be God?" He said, "No, it wouldn't be God." He said, "Who then would it be?" He said, "Well, it'd be the devil." "Well then," he said, "you've got the devil telling you to do it tomorrow and God telling you to do it today. Now, whose voice are you going to listen to?" You know what this man did? Put his hand in his fist, and slapped it in there. And he said, "Preacher, I've listened to the devil all of my life, and all it's ever brought me is grief. I'm going to listen to God, and do it now." And he slipped down on his knees, and

prayed with Dr. Hankins, and gave his heart to Jesus Christ, and was saved, born again there on his knees.

The next Sunday morning, that pastor, the next morning, literally, was standing on the front steps of that church, welcoming people as they came to church. This businessman's nephew came up hurriedly to the pastor, and said, "Pastor, my uncle had a heart attack last night, but he said to tell you that he still meant what he said. As soon as he's well, he'll come forward and make public what he did." Dr. Hankins went on in the service that morning, and when he finished the service and went home for lunch, he got a phone call, this time from the businessman's sister-in-law. And said, "Pastor, Pat's heart attack was worse than we thought. He's had another seizure, and, Pastor, they say it's very serious. They think he's dying." The pastor said, "Let me get my things together. I'll be over there as quickly as I can." Before the pastor could get away from the house, the phone rang again. They said, "No need to come. No need to hurry, Pastor. He's gone. But, Pastor, before he died, he said to tell you thanks so much for encouraging him to obey God, and give his heart to Christ when he did."

Boast not thyself of tomorrow. For thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. And to him that knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin. Have you been planning your coming year without God? Have you? Have you been saying, "Well I've got plenty of time?"

Have you? Is there something that God the Holy Spirit is telling you to do, and you're not doing it? Friend, the way to face your future is to bring God into your planning. Live one day at a time, and obey God daily, step by step. Amen?

Father God, seal the message to our hearts. While heads are bowed and eyes are closed, if you're not saved today, I want to do with you what that pastor did with the businessman. I want to guide you in a decision. I want you to pray right now, and I'm going to ask that no one stir, no one move. If you're saved, you begin to pray for those who may not be saved. And I want you to pray a prayer like this; if you're not absolutely certain you're saved, just pray like this: Dear God—that's right, just speak to Him out of your heart. Dear God, I know that you love me and I know that you want to save me. Jesus, I believe you're the Son of God. I believe you paid my sin debt with your blood on that cross, and I believe God raised you from the dead. I believe it. And, Lord, not only do I believe it, but I receive it. Come into my heart right now, this moment. Come in, Lord Jesus. Forgive my sin; cleanse me; save me. I'm a lost sinner, and I need to be saved. I'm sick of my sin. I repent of my sin. I open my heart. I trust you now as my Lord and Savior. Begin now to make what you want me to be. And, Lord Jesus, give me the courage to make it public, and I will today. Today I will openly and publicly let it be known that I'm trusting you. You died for me. I will not be ashamed for you, and when that invitation is given, when the pastor invites people to come forward, I will come

forward. Tell Him that. By your grace, and with your strength, I will today, now, confess you as my Lord and Savior. Amen.

Now look up here. How are you saved? You believe, you receive, and you confess. Now, the confession is only an indication that you've already trusted. But the faith that will not lead to confession will not lead to heaven. Jesus said, "If you're ashamed of me, I'll be ashamed of you. If you confess me before men, I'll confess you before my Father in heaven." That's why we're going to invite you now to make public what you prayed in your heart. Standing at the head of each of these aisles this morning will be a minister of this church. And today, if you said, "Lord Jesus, come into my heart. I trust you to save me," I want you to seal that by coming forward. The chorus that we're going to sing is in your bulletin. It says this: Lord, I believe; Lord, I receive; Lord, I confess you now; now—now—I confess you. And you step out and come forward.

Now, there are others of you, you're saved and you know that you're saved, but you need a church home. And if you need a church home, and Bellevue is where you feel the Spirit of God moving, and you want to be a growing, faithful member of this church, I invite you to come down any of these aisles, and tell the minister that you want to place your membership here. And you can lead the way for those who need to receive Christ as their personal Savior. If you come, just tell the minister you want to place your membership here. If you're coming to trust Christ, or making it known that you've trusted Christ, you tell the minister, "I'm trusting Jesus."

Planning Your Future

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: December 31, 2000

Main Scripture Text: James 4:13–17

“Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”

JAMES 4:14

Outline

Introduction

- I. Beware of Self-Centered Planning
- II. Beware of Self-Confident Presumption
- III. Beware of Self-Complacent Procrastination

Conclusion

Introduction

Turn to the Book of James. We’re going to be talking about your future, so you ought to be interested. James chapter 4, and, in a moment, we’re going to begin reading in verse 13.

We’re interested in the future. We want to know what the year is going to bring to us. People have different ways of looking in the future. Would you believe that some use tea leaves to try to look into the future. Others use palm reading. Others use astrology. Those are a little more sophisticated. They read books like Megatrends, and other things, trying to understand what the future holds for us.

Now, I’m going to read to you a story. It’s a story about a first-century wheeler-dealer, a boastful businessman, a man who was making plans for his future. And he has many brothers here in this twenty-first century. And I want us to look at the story, and we’re going to learn some lessons from it. This is James chapter 4, beginning in verse 13:

“Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain; whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings; all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore, to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

Now, we’re going to be talking about a man who, in many respects, would be called

a successful man in the first century or the twenty-first century. But let me give you a definition of failure, before we even get started. And it may be a different definition than you've been used to. But failure is succeeding at the wrong thing. Failure is succeeding at the wrong thing. Everybody in this city may be calling you a success, and you may be an abysmal failure.

All right, this man made three major mistakes, and I don't want you to make them. So, as you plan for your future, I want to give you three warnings, and we'll let each one of them begin with the word beware.

I. Beware of Self-Centered Planning

First of all, beware of self-centered planning—beware of self-centered planning. Now, listen to this man. Get inside of his head, as he's planning. He is looking forward to the future in a business endeavor. And, first of all, he's planning the period of time. Look, if you will, in verse 13: "Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will enter into such a, such a city, and continue there a year." Now, this man, in his mind, he says, "All right, today or tomorrow, I'm going to go to a city, and I'm going to stay there for a year." So I can see this man. He has his calendar out. He has his pencil sharp. He's looking at these things. And so, he encircles this day, and draws a line through this year, and he says, "That's where I'm going to invest my time this coming year." So he's planning the period of time. But he's not finished yet.

He's also planning the place where he's going to go. Look at it again in verse 13: "I will go into such a city." Now, he has all of the cities out there. He's looking at this city, that city, the advantages here, the advantages there. He says, "That's the city." And so, on the map, he puts a circle around the city. Over here on the calendar, he has the date underlined. So he has already planned the place, and he has planned the period. But not only that—he goes on to plan something else.

He plans the procedure. Now, he's going to buy and sell. Evidently, he has some marketing scheme. Maybe he has a degree in marketing from the University of Jerusalem. He has a degree in administration, so he has been running the numbers. And he says, "I can buy the product for this, and I can sell it for that, and I can make a profit." So, he has planned the period; he's planned the place; he's planned the procedure.

He's also planned the profit. He says, "I will buy and sell and get gain." That's it. I am going to make a bundle this year, and he's doing all of this planning. Sounds good to me. It doesn't look like he's doing anything wrong. The Bible certainly doesn't condemn business; it encourages it. The Bible certainly doesn't condemn planning; it encourages it. The Bible is certainly not against making a profit; it encourages all of it. These things are not wrong.

Look at this man, and you'll find out what was wrong with him. He left God out of his plans altogether. He's not consulting with God. He's not seeking the will of God. He's like so many here in this auditorium this morning. Your worship life is one thing; your business life is another thing. You've divided your life into the secular and the sacred. And so, you come to church and worship, and then you plan your life as if there were no God. And the biggest fool is not the man who says there is no God; the biggest fool is the man who says there is a God and then doesn't live like it.

Have you really taken God into your plans? You see, the key to all of this—look in verse 15, and you'll see the key to all of this: "For that we ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." He'd not said, "Lord, what is Your will?" He's not seeking the will of God. He is not saying, "O God, show me Your will." He says, "I'm going to do it this time. I'm going to go to this place. I'm going to do this procedure. I'm going to make this kind of money." He has not at all sought to bring God into his plans. There is a big if in all of this. "If—if—the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that."

Have you ever asked God, "Lord, bless what I'm doing," rather than "Lord, help me to do what You're blessing," to find really the will of God? Now, God wants to show you His will. God wants to show you His will, as you look into your future. I want to give you a few verses. Just jot them in your margin, wherever you're making notes. And don't try to look them up. Let me just give them to you right now.

Psalm 32, verse 8—here's a promise: "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go; I will guide thee with mine eye." And, by the way, to be guided with God's eye means that you have a very close relationship with Him. Have you ever been guided by anybody's eye? If you're married, you certainly have. Have you ever been in a restaurant and started a conversation, and your wife looks at you, and you stop right away and you go in another direction? She just says, "Bud, don't say any more about that." You know, that's just guiding with your eye. When my children were little, they'd sit on the front row, and Joyce would be in the choir, and I'd be preaching, they'd be cutting up. Nobody else would know it, but I'd look down, and say, "You're going to get it when you get home," and go right on; just guiding with the eye. And they'd straighten up. That's the kind of an intimate relationship we need with the Lord.

Isaiah 30, verse 21: "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." There's a sort of a heavenly sonar. There's God saying, "Don't go this way; don't go that way. This is the way; walk in it." Would you like God to guide you that way in the coming year?

John 16, verse 13—listen to it—Jesus gives the promise with more specificity, speaking of the dear, precious Holy Spirit: "Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth." We have a heavenly guide. He is the Holy Spirit of

God. He is here to lead us.

One more verse, Romans 8, verse 14—listen to it: “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” How wonderful. How wonderful to have God guiding us with His eye. How wonderful to hear the voice of God saying, “This is the way; walk in it.” How wonderful to be led by the dear Spirit of God. We don’t need to be floundering around, and come to the end of our lives, and, in the words of another, say, “Well, my youth was a mistake, my manhood a struggle, and my old age a regret.” How sad to come to life that way.

Now, listen—listen. God has a plan for every area of your life, not just your church. Your education, your business, your marriage, your reaction—God has a plan for your life. Do you want it? Let me give you three words that will help you to find it. And we’ll let them start with the letter C.

The first is the word confession. Confess your sins. Get your heart right with God. You want God to lead you? Listen. Psalm 66, verse 18, says, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” You are wasting your breath, if you pray with unconfessed, unrepented of sin in your heart and in your life. Are you listening? That’s so plain. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” We’re talking about the great prayer promises—that is one of them. Listen to 1 John 1, verses 5 and 6: “This, then, is the message that we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and the truth is not in us, and we lie, and do not the truth.” You see, if there’s sin in our lives, rather than walking in the light, we are stumbling in the dark.

Let me put it this way. Do you have an idol in your heart? You say, “Oh, no, they worship idols over in foreign countries. We don’t worship idols here.” Really? Do you know what an idol is? An idol is anything you love more than God. An idol is anything you serve more than God. An idol is anything that you fear more than God. Let me give you a verse of Scripture—Ezekiel 14, verse 3: “Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face. Should I be inquired of at all by them?” That is, can these men who have idols say, “God lead me?” God says, “Look, these men have idols in their heart. What right do they have to come to Me and ask Me to guide them?”

So, if you want to know God’s will for the future, number one, confession; make certain there is no unconfessed, unrepented of sin in your life. Does that sound strange to you? That’s normal living—that’s normal living.

As I stand before you—and I don’t say this braggingly; I’d be a fool not to say it—there’s no unconfessed, unrepented of sin in my life that I know of. I’d be a sheer fool. How can you expect to have God in your life, if you regard iniquity in your heart?

Number one: confession. “If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Number two—number two: consecration. It’s not enough to be clean; you need to be consecrated. Proverbs chapter 3, and verse 6: “In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” Do you really want to know the will of God, or do you just want God to help you in your plans? Have you acknowledged Him? In all of your ways—not some of your ways—acknowledge Him. Don’t say, “Listen, Lord, your servant’s speaking.” Say, “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.”

Number three—listen: confession, which leads to cleansing; then consecration; and here’s the most important—well, not the most important, but a vital thing—and that is concentration—concentration. Confession. Consecration. Concentration. Listen to God. You see, there’s a voice behind you. There’s God guiding you with His eye. The Holy Spirit is spoken of as a gentle dove, as a still, small voice. This is why you need that quiet time alone with God. You say, “Well, God never speaks to me.” Well, you’d be foolish to deny that there’s music in the air just because you have your radio turned off. God is speaking. Are you listening? So, here’s the first thing I want to say to you, as we think about your future. Beware of this godless planning. Beware of self-centered planning, okay?

II. Beware of Self-Confident Presumption

Not only should you beware of self-centered planning, but you need to beware of self-confident presumption—self-confident presumption. Look in verse 14: “Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life, but even a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, or do this, or that.”

I just spoke this morning to one of our dear ladies who said, “I was driving on the highway a few days ago. There was ice on the road. The car in front of me hit its brakes, I hit my brakes, and my car spun around, and turned over and over and over, an SUV. She said, “Everything just flashed in front of my eyes,” and she said, “God delivered me.” I said, “What was going through your mind at that time?” She said, “I thought I was going to see my mother again.” And then, she said, “I turned my thoughts to God immediately, and then I kind of felt around to see if I was all there, and I was.” Our lives are like that, like a vapor. The word, “what is your life? It is even a vapor,” it’s the word *atmos*. It’s the word we get atmosphere from. It’s like that foggy breath you saw this morning on this crisp, cold air day. It’s there for a little while, and then vanishes away. This may be the last sermon I will ever preach. This may be the last sermon you will ever hear. Don’t boast carelessly about the future. You know, the old timers used to sign their letters DV. Did you ever get a letter that somebody would sign at the end, “I’ll

see you so and so, DV?” What does that mean? Deo Volente—God willing. God willing. We don’t know what the future holds. Now, we think, “Well, I’ve got this coming year to live.” This may be the year you check out of here. This may be the year that you are going to heaven, or this may be the year that you’re going to hell. This may be your final year. You don’t know.

I may have told about a friend I had named Bob. Bobby and I were in seminary together, and Bob and I would commute from our church field to seminary, on the Chef Menteur Highway down in New Orleans, from New Orleans to the Gulf Coast of Mississippi. We’d go back and forth on Sunday mornings, about a 65-mile trip. And I had to be in class at 8:00 in the morning, so you can imagine what time I had to get up and go. And we would drive back and forth, and fellowship. Bob pastored a little church out in the country, actually the area that Brett Favre comes from, the great football player, and he pastored a church there, and he would talk to me, and I would talk to him. And he was a big old tall, handsome, sun-crowned guy. We would fish together there for speckled trout in the Gulf Coast, and laugh and talk back and forth going to school, pray together, encourage one another in the ministry. Bob was in his 20’s, early 20’s. He said to me on an occasion, “Adrian, I know of a man on your church field who’s lost. He doesn’t understand how to be saved. He’s very sick. He doesn’t have long to live.” As I remember what he said to me, he said it something like this: “Adrian, he has one foot in the grave, and another foot on a banana peel.” I think that’s the way he said it. He said, “He’s had a very serious heart attack. He’s an old man. I don’t think he has long to live. His name is Mr. Bourgeois.” He said, “Adrian, he’s on your church field. Would you go by and talk to Mr. Bourgeois about Jesus?” I said, “Yes, Bob, I will.” So I went upon a time, just cold turkey. He didn’t know me at all, but I knocked on the door. The old man came to the door. I said, “Are you Mr. Bourgeois?” He said, “Yes.” I said, “I’m Adrian Rogers. I live here in this town, and I’m the pastor of the little Baptist church here. Would you mind if I just came in and shared with you about the Lord Jesus Christ, and how you can know that you’re going to heaven when you die?” He said, “No, not at all. Come in.” So I went in and I shared with Mr. Bourgeois. He prayed and asked Jesus to come into his heart, was wonderfully saved, and I thank God for that. But that’s not the end of the story. Bob, my young, sun-crowned, tall, handsome, vigorous buddy, a few days after that was having dinner with his wife. He ate a meal. They had a little conversation. He stood up, took a few steps across the living room floor, gave a gasp, fell down, and died right there in the living room. This was a young man in his 20’s, the picture of health, in my estimation. Now, he had said to me, “Adrian, there’s an old man on your church field who only has a few days to live.” That old man lived for years. It was Bob who only had a few days to live.

Now, I know what you’re thinking. You think, “Well, I’m in good health. I’m young. I’m

this, I'm..." Friend, you don't know, do you? You do not know. What is your life? It's a vapor that appears for a little while, and then vanishes away. And what we need to beware of is not only self-centered planning, but what we need to beware of is self-confident presumption, thinking we're going to do this, or we're going to that, and we get frivolous with our use of time.

Proverbs 27, verse 1, says, "Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." So I'm going to ask you, as you plan the future, to say, "Lord God, I don't know what the future is. I don't know whether I how much more time I have. So, Lord, help me not to waste time. Help me to apply my days unto wisdom. And, Lord, may I live out the rest of my days, whether they be few, or whether they be many, may they be used for You." To kill time is suicide by degrees. Don't presume upon the time that you have. If this were the last sermon you would ever hear, would you go from this meeting place to heaven or hell? Many a time, I've preached the last sermon that a person has ever heard before they died. Are you ready? Do you know Jesus? Are you saved? "Oh," you say, "I'll get saved one of these days." "Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."

III. Beware of Self-Complacent Procrastination

Now, here's the third and the final thing I want to lay upon your heart, as you think about your future. Not only beware of self-centered planning, leaving God out of your planning; beware of self-confident presumption, to think that you have so much time. By the way, before we leave that point, you know, Jesus, in Luke 12, told of a rich farmer. He also was a businessman. Farmers are businessmen. This may had a great crop. It was so great that he didn't really have enough room to warehouse it all. He said, "What am I going to do? My barns are overflowing." He said, "Well, I know what I'll do." He said, "Since I have much goods laid up, well, first of all, I'll tear down these old barns, and I'll build bigger barns. And then, I will say to myself, 'Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years. Eat, drink, and be merry.'" And Jesus said that God said unto him, "You fool, you fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee. Then whose shall those things be that you have laid up in store?" You've got a big bank account, do you? You say, "I've got enough squared away for my retirement. I'm all right." You may not have 24 hours. "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." He said, "Many years." God said, "Tonight." His clock was slow.

Here's the third thing you need to beware of: not only self-centered planning, not only self-confident presumption, but perhaps the most dangerous thing of all, and it is this, friend—you need to beware of self-complacent procrastination—self-complacent procrastination. Now, notice to where James is headed. Look at it. He says in verse 15: "For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye

rejoice in your boastings:—here was a man very complacent, very boastful—all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

Now, here’s a man who knew what he ought to do, but he didn’t do it. He’s boasting in himself, all that he’s done. He has become complacent. He is aware of God’s will, but he doesn’t want to do it. Procrastination may be the biggest problem that most of us have today. It’s a very deceptive sin. You see, other sins are very obvious. Drunkenness, stealing, hate, violence: these are all very obvious. Procrastination is so deceptive. Many of us think we’re doing good if we don’t do the dirty dozen sins. You know, we have our little list of sins, and we say, “Well, I don’t do any of those things. I’m fine.” But most of us don’t think of procrastination as a sin. Now, the Bible says, “to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” I’ve said this before, but I want you to listen to it. It is a greater sin to fail to do what you ought to do than to do what you ought not to do. Now, most of us don’t believe that, but I believe it with all of my heart. The Bible teaches it. The Bible teaches that the sins of omission are greater than the sins of commission. And it’s very simple, if you think about it.

Why is it a greater sin to fail to do what you ought to do than to do what you ought not to do? Simple. If you’re doing what you ought to do, you can’t do what you ought not to do. But, even if you’re not doing what you ought not to do, you still wouldn’t be doing what you ought to do. So it is a greater sin to fail to do what you ought to do than to do what you ought not to do. The sins of omission are greater than the sins of commission.

A little boy said, “The sins of omission, those are the sins you ought to have done and didn’t do.” No. What are the sins of omission? Why does he say, “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin?” It’s not that the man says, I will never do it; he just doesn’t do it. It is self-complacent procrastination.

Now, this sin is not only very deceptive, but, you know, it’s kind of respectful, because you don’t know what God is leading me to do. You don’t know what God is telling me to do, so I may look very fine to you, very respectful to you, and yet this sin would be in my heart and in my life.

Let me talk to you about the sin of omission, the sin of procrastination. Let me tell you why it is such a dangerous and deceptive sin. It’s the reason that people are lost. Why do people go to hell today? Because they lie, steal, commit adultery? No. Oh, those are sins worthy to damn us, but those sins have been paid for. Now, the reason a person is lost today simply is because he’s failed to do what he ought to do. John chapter 3 and verse 18—Jesus said, “He that believeth on him—speaking of Himself—is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed.” No longer is a man condemned to hell because he’s a sinner, because those sins have been paid for. “He that believeth on him—on Jesus—is not condemned: but

he that believeth not is condemned already.” Why? Because he has not believed.

One time, I read of a tract. On one side, it said, “What must I do to be saved?” The answer—Acts 16, verse 31: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” On the other side of the tract, it said, “What must I do to be lost?” And there was nothing printed there. Why? Because you don’t have to do anything to be lost. You don’t have to curse the church. You don’t have to blaspheme God. You are already lost. “He that believeth on Him is not condemned: he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed.” It is the sin of omission now that sends a soul to hell.

Many of you want to correct your thinking. You say, “My mind is messed up. How am I going to get these images of pornography out of my mind? How am I going to get this hatred out of my mind, these negative thoughts out of our mind? Do you know why you think wrongly? Because you’re not thinking rightly. You see, the reason we do this, what Zig Ziglar calls “this stinking thinking,” is because we are not thinking what we ought to think. Your mind is like a garden. You don’t have to sow weeds. All you have to do is to fail to cultivate the garden. The weeds will come. Let me tell you something wonderful: God created you. God made you where you cannot think two thoughts at one time. If you’re thinking what is right, you cannot be thinking what is wrong. Now, when David got into trouble and committed adultery with Bathsheba, the Bible teaches that it was in the afternoon. David was still in bed. He hadn’t gotten out of bed. He had forgotten, I’m certain, to have a quiet time with the Lord in the morning. His problem was not aggressive lust; it was simply neglected duty. He was failing to do what he ought to have done, and, therefore, he did what he ought not to do. Center your heart, your mind, on God. Fill your heart and mind with that which is right, true, just, lovely, pure, virtuous, of good report—you’re not going to have difficulty with impure, unclean thoughts.

The sin of omission is the reason many homes are broken up. Now, God’s plan is one man married to one woman till death do them part. But we have homes, even in our Christian churches, that are being fractured, and coming apart. What do you have to do to harm your home? Do you have to beat or curse your wife? Do you have to commit adultery against your husband? No, just neglect to do what you ought to do. “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” I don’t know how many times a day I tell Joyce that I love her, but I do. I hold her in my arms, and say, “I love you. You’re precious. You’re wonderful to me.” Listen. One man said to his wife, she said, “Why don’t you tell me you love me?” He said, “When we got married, I told you I loved you. If I change my mind, I’ll let you know. Love is not like a diamond that you get and hold and treasure forever. You know, the ad, “Diamonds are Forever”? By the way, they’re not. No. Love is like a flower. It has to be cultivated. It’s tender. Love is a growing, living thing. This is why so many homes fail, just by neglect. Your love—you

have to visualize it, you have to verbalize it, you have to vitalize it. Why do churches fail? Why do we have here in our county half-empty churches? Is it because people have gone to war against the church? No, they have simply neglected their church.

There's a verse of Scripture over there in the Book of Numbers chapter 32, verse 23, and this is what it says: "But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the Lord: and be sure your sin will find you out." Now, what sin is that? Well, what had happened is, when the Israelites were coming out of Egypt and going into Canaan, before they crossed over into Canaan, there on the east side before they went over to what we call today the West Bank, on the east side there were two tribes, Reuben and Gad who said to Joshua, "Look, we don't want to cross over. We just want to stay here. The grass is tall and lush. Our families love it here. If it's all right with you, we'll just stay here." But Joshua said, "But your brothers are going to war over there. When they cross over into Canaan, the Canaanites are there. There are going to be battles." And the tribes of Gad and Reuben said, "That's okay. When it's time for war, we will come over and help our brothers." And here's what Joshua said, "All right. But if you don't do so, you have sinned against the Lord, "and be sure your sin will find you out." Now, what does that mean to us today? Well, you know, we have a lot of people who want to stay on the easy side of the river, don't we? We have a lot of people who want others to work and build their church, but they just want to sit over here on this side and not come to the aid of this church. Question: How much of the work of this church is being done by you? Or, do you think you've done God a wild favor when you get here on Sunday morning? Did you know that, when you don't come, it's a vote to close the door? If everybody voted like you voted, there wouldn't even be a service. Some of you folks are watching at home. You could be here, but you didn't come. You're a member of Bedside Baptist. "He wasn't much for stirring about; it wasn't his desire. While others worked to build their church, he was sitting by the fire. Same old story day by day; he never seemed to tire. No matter what the others did, he was sitting by the fire. At last he died, as all must do; some say he went up higher. But if he's doing what he used to do, he's sitting by the fire.

No man has a right to be at peace when his brethren are at war. We have people in our churches that say, "Well, feed me—feed me. Oh, Brother So-and-So feeds me more than Brother So-and-So." They want to eat the meat, drink the sweet, let others work. They don't do anything. They're the reason that so many churches are failing today. You don't have to go to war against the church. Listen: "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." If every member of this church were just like you, what kind of a church would this church be? If everybody sang with the same enthusiasm you sing with, if everybody gives the same portion of their salary that you give, if everybody prayed for the lost like you pray. We have people who are clockA

watchers during the invitation. They're not interested in souls getting saved. They're interested in being the first in the cafeteria line. That's right. They really do not care. They say, "Well, I haven't done anything wrong." "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." I'm telling you, the reason that people are lost is the sin of omission. The reason that people have wrong thinking is the sin of omission. The reason that homes break up—the sin of omission. The reason that church fail—it is the sin of omission, failing to do what we ought to do. You say, "Well, one of these days I'm going to get to it." Friend, you have sin in your heart. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

Conclusion

I've got to conclude the message today, but I, as we think about your future—your future—beware of self-centered planning. Don't leave God out of your plan. As you think about your future, beware of self-confident presumption. You do not have a promise of tomorrow. Your life is like a vapor. What you're going to do—if you think about your future, beware of self-complacent procrastination, saying, "Mañana, one of these days, I'm going to do it." "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

I'm going to give an invitation for some of you to come and be a part of this New Testament church. You ought to do it—then do it. Why do you wait? Some of you need to give your heart to Jesus. You say, "One of these days I'm going to do it." Now, some people don't believe in God at all. They don't believe in heaven or hell. But I have met a number of people who know there's a death to die, a God to face, a judgment to go through, and you ask them why they're not saved, and they say, "Well, I'm going to; I'm going to do that some day." Listen to me. Why would you talk that way? I've never talked to a man who ever said, "I am determined to go to hell." But people think one of these days, I'll be saved. But the Bible says, "Behold, now is the accepted time. Behold, now is the day of salvation." The Bible says, "Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."

You want to face your future? Face your future by giving your heart to Jesus Christ, and letting the Holy Spirit of God be in you, to guide you, and to show you, and to give you a hope that is wonderful and glorious. If I had a thousand lives to live, I'd give them all to Jesus.

Would you bow your heads in prayer? Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. How many of you would say, "Pastor Rogers, I am saved; I know that I am saved, and not because I 'feel saved,' but because I have a Bible reason; I have repented of my sin; I've trusted Jesus Christ as my personal Savior and Lord; as evidence that I've trusted Him, I made it public and followed Him in believers' baptism; I am now following Jesus, living for Jesus, in obedience in a fellowship of a New Testament church, and that is my

testimony—could you lift your hand that way? Thank you. Now, if you couldn't lift your hand, there may be several reasons. First of all, maybe you've never really repented of your sin and trusted Jesus. Or, maybe you're done that, and yet you've never really acknowledged Him, and made it public, and followed Him in believers' baptism. Or, maybe you've done that, but you're not in fellowship right now, you know it. Or you know you need God to work in your heart and in your life. What a wonderful time it would be today for you to start this new year, this wonderful time, with none of the baggage of yesterday, to say, anew and afresh, 'I'm giving my heart to You, my God.' If you're not saved, I want you to pray a prayer like this: Dear God, I'm a sinner, and I'm lost. I'm ashamed of my sin. I repent of my sin. I turn from my sin to You, Jesus. I open my heart. I receive You by faith into my life as my Lord and Savior. Take control of my life and begin now to make me the person You want me to be, and I will follow You the rest of my days, if You will only give me strength. I will live for You, not in order to be saved, but because You have saved me by Your grace. I just trust You now. In Your holy name. Amen.

The Sad Case of the Boastful Businessman

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: August 20, 1978

Main Scripture Text: James 4:13–17

“But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.”

JAMES 4:16

Outline

Introduction

- I. An Attitude We Should Never Take
 - A. He Planned the Period of Time
 - B. He Planned the Place
 - C. He Planned the Procedure
 - D. He Planned the Profits
- II. An Assumption We Should Never Make
- III. An Activity You Should Never Forsake

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Introduction

Take your Bibles now, please, and turn to the Book of James. We’re continuing our sermon series through the Book of James. We come now to James chapter 4 and verse 13, and I trust that you use your Bibles and follow along. I dare say that you’ll get at least 50% more from any message if you will use your Bibles. James chapter 4 and verse 13—we’re thinking today on “The Sad Case of the Boastful Businessman.”

Now, a while back we talked about the sad case of the shortsighted usher; and tonight, we’re going to talk about the sad case of the fraudulent farmer—but today, the boastful businessman: *“Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little [while], and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin”* (James 4:13–17).

The man who says there’s no God is a fool, but he may not be the biggest fool.

There may be even yet a bigger fool than the man who says there is not God. “Who could that be, Pastor?” It is the man who says there is a God and then doesn’t live like it. That’s what James is talking about here. James is addressing himself to people who claim to believe in God, but as you look at their lives, you would never know that they believe in God, for they live for self and self alone as though Jesus had never lived, as though Jesus had never died.

James tells us the story of a first-century wheeler-dealer. Here was a man who was a very shrewd businessman. Here was a man who made some very astute plans. He knew exactly where he was going, and he knew how to get there—at least he thought so. But, he was, in the eyes of God, a successful failure, and he has many twentieth-century brothers who are listening to me right now. And so, I want us to notice three things about the scripture that I have given to you this morning.

I. An Attitude We Should Never Take

The first of these is an attitude that we should never take—verse 13—an attitude that we should never take. Notice what James says: he says, “*Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain*” (James 4:13). Now, what is the attitude that we should never take? It is an attitude of self-sufficiency. Now, I want you to notice just how self-sufficient this man was in his planning.

A. He Planned the Period of Time

First of all, he planned the period of time. He said, “*To day or to morrow we will [enter] into such a city, and continue there [for] a year*” (James 4:13). He had counted out on his calendar. He’d put 365 Xs. He had just taken his calendar—he said, “This is what I’m going to do next year and not ask God about it.” He’d not prayed to the Lord about it. He just assumed that he had 365 days and that in those days he would do what he wished.

B. He Planned the Place

But, not only did he plan the period, he planned the place. He didn’t say, “Lord, where would You have me to go?” To the contrary, he spread out his map; he looked at the trend of business, and he said, “There is my city. I’m going to that city. That’s where I’m going. It seems wise to me.”

C. He Planned the Procedure

Not only did he plan the period and not only did he plan the place—he planned the procedure. He’s going to buy, and he’s going to sell (James 4:13). That’s the business he’s going to be in. He’s going to be a merchant. He’s already studied the charts. He’s

already read the *Wall Street Journal*. He's already looked into *Fortune Magazine*. He's studied the trends of economics. After all, doesn't he have a degree in marketing from Memphis State? He knows exactly what he's going to do. He is going into a particular business to buy and to sell, and he feels quite confident.

D. He Planned the Profits

Not only does he plan the period, the place, the procedure—he's even planned the profits. He is going to buy. He is going to sell. He is going to get gain. It's not prayer but profits that have this man. He is not interested in heavenly treasure; he's interested in earthly profits, and he has it all mapped out. And, there's nothing wrong really intrinsically with what he did. There's nothing wrong with planning ahead. There's nothing wrong with going to a city. Somebody said, "Everybody's got to be somewhere." There's nothing wrong with business. As a matter of fact, the Bible encourages business and productivity, and the Bible says we're "*not [to be] slothful in business*" (Romans 12:11). We're to be "*fervent in spirit*" (Romans 12:11). There's nothing wrong with profitmaking, and don't you think for one little moment that there is. The Bible teaches that it is quite all right and proper to make a profit. And, that's not what James is remonstrating with this man about.

Here is a man who has done it all in a spirit of self-sufficiency. He is boasting about what he's going to do. The key is in verse 16: "*But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil*" (James 4:16). He didn't ask God about it. He didn't say, "*If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that*" (James 4:15). He just stood on his own two feet, stuck out his own big chin, and said, "This is what I'm going to do." And, he's got a lot of brothers who are listening to me right now. And, it may not be in the world of business. It may be in the world of sports. It may be in the world of education. It may be in the world of marriage. It may be your vacation. Whatever it is, you feel quite sufficient to make your plans apart from God.

One man, years ago, wrote the words to a poem called "Invictus," which means "victorious." He thought of himself as being quite sufficient. And, this poem just sort of drips with a self-sufficiency and an arrogance. He says this:

*Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.*

*In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.*

*Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.
It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll.
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul (William Ernest Henley).*

Every time I read that, I feel like saying, “Captain, your ship is about to sink.” “I am the master of my fate: / I am the captain of my soul” (William Ernest Henley). Have you felt that way? Have you felt it is your life to plan, it is your decision to make, and you’ve not consulted Almighty God? James says that you are a practical atheist. You’re living as though there is no God, even though you believe in one. There’s an attitude we should not take.

II. An Assumption We Should Never Make

But now, the second thing I want you to notice here in this book—not only an attitude we should not take, but there’s also an assumption we should not make—an assumption we should not make. Notice in verse 14, James says, “*Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away*”—and in verse 15—“*For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that*” (James 4:14–15). What is the assumption that we should not make? It is that we should not assume that we have tomorrow, that we have one more day. James says that your life hangs by a brittle thread. James says that your life is very fragile. James says that your life is like the steam from the teakettle. James says that your life is like a puff of smoke. James says that your life is like a breath on a frosty day. It is a vapor: it appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

You see, dear friend, as you sit here right now and listen to me, there is but a heartbeat—just a heartbeat—between you and eternity. That’s all. Someone has described that heartbeat as “a muffled drum beating a funeral march to the grave.” You don’t know when you’re going to die; I don’t know when I’m going to die. Every year some 5,000 Americans die, and they little dream, many of them, that they’re going to die when they do. Some 4,000 Americans will get in their automobiles this year, little dreaming it will be the last ride they’ll ever take. And, their lives will be snuffed out on American highways. Some will die of disease. Some will die of disaster. Some will die of decay. Some will die by design, at their hand or someone else’s hand, but die they will.

You know, I’ve always been somewhat wondered—at least, I’ve sometimes

wondered—at the logic of people when they talk about some narrow escape that they had. Maybe they were in an automobile accident, or maybe they were very dreadfully sick. And, they tell about it later on, and they say, “I was closer to death at that time than I’ve ever been.” Maybe a train just narrowly missed them. Maybe they were shot down in the Pacific in the war. Maybe they lost consciousness in the operating room, and they say, “Oh, I was so close to death.” Don’t you believe it, friend. That’s not when you were closest to death. You recovered, didn’t you? You weren’t close to death; you were close to recovery. You listen to me: you are closest to death now than you’ve been—right now. This moment, this second, you are closer to death than you’ve ever been. And, you live extremely close to death. The Bible says there is but a step between me and death.

I have a dear friend that lives down in Florida. This past summer I went down on my vacation to meet my dear friend, Brother Jim. Oh, I wish you could see the broad shoulders and the suntan! This man lives there on the Atlanta Ocean—there in Riviera Beach. And, last summer, when I was down there, he said, “Adrian, let’s go snorkeling.” I said, “All right.” And, we went out and snorkeled. And ladies, that means to swim underwater with a mask. And, we looked at the fish, and we had such a good time. He said, “Adrian, next year when you come down”—said, “we’ll go snorkeling again.” He says, “When you have Dr. Henry Brant to come speak for your Family Life Conference, I’ll come up there.” So, this man is an activist. He’s a man that sails boats, and flies airplanes, and goes all over the country. He headed up “Here’s Life” for South Florida down there.

But, just a few weeks ago, my dear friend Jim was at a banquet in California for the “Here’s Life” emphasis, sitting there with another dear friend of mine, Brother Leroy Eager. They had just played a marvelous game of tennis and were having a wonderful time at a lovely banquet. And, my friend turned to my other friend, and he said, “Leroy,” and he was gone—just like that. Leroy said to me a few weeks ago—he said, “Adrian, when Jim turned to me and said, ‘Leroy,’ I thought he was going to say something like, ‘Well, the dessert is surely good,’ or, ‘Pass the butter.’ But, it was the last breath—just a word with a little smile on his face. He dropped his head, and he was dead right there on the spot.”

Oh, that’s what we read in the scripture: there is but a step between me and death. I know what you’re thinking—I know exactly what you’re thinking: you’re thinking, “That’s right, Pastor. You tell them.” That’s what you’re thinking. You have it all figured out how you’re going to die. You’re going to live to be about 94, and then you’re going to feel a few pains and go to the doctor, and he’ll tell you to get ready. And then, you’re going to go check over the insurance papers one more time, recheck the will; you’re going to call in all the grandkids, kiss them goodbye, put on your pajamas, crawl in bed, turn up your

toes, pull up the covers and die. Now, that's what you think. I mean, that's the way you have it all figured out for you. And, you say, "Now, you tell the rest of these people that they may die."

Let me tell you something: I had a friend that I used to go to school with when I was in seminary down on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi. I pastored a church there, and we went back and forth to New Orleans. We commuted to seminary. His name was Bob—one of the finest soul winners I've ever met. A tall fellow—very lean, very handsome, an outdoors type of man—but he had a passion for souls. Bob McNamee (he was about my age) said to me, "Adrian, there is an old man that lives on your church field, and he's had several very severe heart attacks. He's very elderly." And, he said, "Adrian, I'm afraid he's going to die any day. He only has a few days to live. Adrian, would you please go by, and speak with him, and share the claims of Christ with him?" I said, "Bob, I'd be glad to." And, I went by to speak to this elderly man. He had a French name; his name was Mr. Bourgeois. And, I went by to speak to Mr. Bourgeois with a little palpitation in my heart because I didn't know how I would be received, because of his religious background and because of his age.

But, I knocked on the door; and I told him who I was, and I told him that I'd come to speak to him about God. And, he welcomed me in, and I told him about the marvelous grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and how Jesus died to save him, and how he can be saved not through ritual and not through sacraments but how he could be saved by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. And, I told him if he would believe and receive Jesus, he could be saved. And, that old man bowed his head, and prayed a prayer, and asked Christ to come into his heart. And, he was saved, and he made a profession of faith. And, I had the joy of baptizing him. And, that would be a wonderful in to the story if that's where it ended, but I want to tell you the rest of the story.

A few days later, my young preacher friend, Bob McNamee, was eating lunch with his wife. They had a delicious lunch—had a nice conversation. He got up from lunch, took several steps across the living room floor, gave a gasp, folded up like a jackknife, fell down dead. The old man Mr. Bourgeois lived for years. Now, Bob said to me, "Adrian, that man only has a few days to live. I want you please to go by and speak to that man about Jesus. He only has a few days." I want to tell you, young preacher boys who are listening to me: you may only have a few days. Did you know that? I want to tell you, who are young, and hale, and healthy, and vibrant, that you do not know. James says, "*What is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little [while]*" (James 4:14). Death is no respecter of persons.

Surely old men must grapple with the icy hands of death. But, I want to tell you also that the young mother must sometimes kiss her precious babies goodbye, and I want to tell you that sometimes even the little child must lay down his toys and grapple with the

iron strength of death. *“What is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little [while], and then vanisheth away”* (James 4:14). Listen to the ticking of your watch. With every tick a soul goes into eternity—60 a minute, 60 a minute, 3,600 every hour, 80,000 souls per day slip out through the jaws of death into eternity. Thirty million souls a year are dying, passing away. And, as I talk, and as I preach, they’re dying, they’re dying, they’re dying, they’re dying. And, one of the ticks of that clock is yours, and one of them is mine. And, you don’t know, and I don’t know. And, how arrogant this man was to say, “Today, tomorrow, I’ll enter into such and such a city. I will continue there a year. I will build, I will buy—rather, I will sell—I will get gain” (James 4:13). And, God says, “You don’t know what shall be on the morrow” (James 4:14).

The Bible says in the Book of Proverbs: *“Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth”* (Proverbs 27:1). Jot these scriptures down. First Chronicles 29, verse 15—what does that say? It says that *“our days...are [but] a shadow”* (1 Chronicles 29:15). Jot this one down—Job chapter 7, and verse 6: *“My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle”* (Job 7:6). Jot this one down—Psalm 39, verse 5: *“Behold, thou hast made my days [a few handbreadths]”* (Psalm 39:5). How about Psalm 102 and verse 3? *“My days [pass away] like smoke”* (Psalm 102:3). How about Psalm 102, verse 11? *“[Thy] days are like [an evening] shadow...I...[wither away] like grass”* (Psalm 102:11).

Do you hear what James is saying to us? Oh, there’s an assumption we should never make, and that is that we have tomorrow. As I preach, I should preach as a dying man would preach—to dying men. I should preach as though this is the last sermon I should ever preach. You should listen as though this is the last sermon that you should ever hear.

For many a’ time, I have preached the last sermon a person has ever heard. **Down in Florida, a little lady stood on the steps of the church, took me by the hand, and said, “Pastor, that was a good sermon. I’ll see you tonight.” I said, “Dottie, I’ll see you tonight. Over the Merritt Island causeway she went—hit a car head on, and her life was blasted out into eternity.” She said, “Tonight,” but there was no tonight for her. You ought to live, dear friend, as though this were the last day that you’re ever going to live.** Is there some money that you intend to give to the cause of Christ? Do it now—do it now! And, there’s a good reason to do it now. Someone said, “Do your givin’ while your livin’, then you’re knowin’ where it’s goin’.” Amen? Don’t leave it around for some people to fight over and for the lawyers to devour. Do it now. Is there someone that you intend to witness to about the Lord Jesus Christ? Is there some friend, some neighbor, some loved one, some child that you intend to bring to Jesus? I beg you, do it now. Don’t wait until the clods are falling on that casket, saying, “Oh, if I only had.”

A lady called me screaming on the phone. She said, “Brother Rogers, Brother

Rogers, my daddy died, and my daddy is lost.” I said, “Get hold of yourself. Your daddy died, but your daddy wasn’t lost. I spoke to your daddy just a few days ago. He bowed his head, and prayed, and asked Jesus Christ to come into his heart.” So far as she knew, though, her daddy was lost, and she waited until after he died to get excited about it.

Listen friend, is there someone that you intend to witness to? Do you intend to get your prayer life to be what it ought to be? Is there some act of kindness that you’re going to do? Has someone been good to you, and you want to be good to that someone? Then for God’s sake, don’t wait ’til they die and put flowers on their grave! It’s all right to do that, and well we ought. Someone has said, “Dead noses smell no roses.” Do it now—now! Live as though this were the last day you ever had, for it may be, it may be, it may be the last day you ever had.

Are you right with God? Are you saved? Do you know beyond the shadow of any doubt or peradventure if you were to die right now, you’d go to Heaven? I wouldn’t live 24 hours without Jesus Christ for one million dollars, and I mean that—and God in heaven knows it. And yet, some of you are putting off Jesus day after day after day for no gain whatever. Tomorrow you’ll just have more sins to repent of and one less day to repent in, if, indeed, tomorrow ever comes. There is an attitude that we should never take. It is an attitude of independence from God, saying what you’re going to do. You better say, “If God wills, you’ll do it.”

III. An Activity You Should Never Forsake

Number two: There’s an assumption that you should never make, and that is that you have tomorrow. Thirdly, there is an activity that you should never forsake—an activity that you should never forsake. Look, if you will, in verse 17: “*Therefore*”—“in the light of this,” and as we’ve said before, *when the Bible says, “therefore,” see what it’s there for.* It connects this to all of the rest of it—“*Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin*” (James 4:17).

Now, what was the sin of the boastful businessman? Not that he had a girlfriend in that other city, not that he got drunk, not that he was dishonest in his business dealings. He just failed to do what he knew he ought to do. It’s not that what he was doing was so wrong; it was simply wrong because it was not what God would have him to do. You see, you can do wrong by doing wrong, and you can also do wrong by not doing right. “*Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin*” (James 4:17). And, the sum total of a life—though it may seem to be successful, and though it may seem to be moral, and though it may seem to be honest—the sum total of that life without God is sin. You live a life without taking God into account—“*to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin*” (James 4:17).

Jesus Christ did not bathe this world with His blood to have you serve the world, the flesh, and the devil. Here James speaks of the terrible sin of omission. You know, there are many people who have never seen themselves as sinners in the sight of God, because they are good businessmen, fine housewives, or mothers, or college students. And, they plan their life, and they work their plan. And, they do pretty good, and they think that the gospel is for the thief, the harlot, the murderer, the prostitute, the down-and-out, but not for them. They don't understand how they're the up-and-out. They don't understand that they commit a sin that is greater than the sin of murder. What is that?

Listen friend, Jesus said the sin of omission is greater than the sin of commission. Do you know what the greatest sin in the world is? It is to leave God out of your life—don't you forget it—just to leave God out of your life. You see, a man may go to Hell for what he does, but he'll miss Heaven because of what he doesn't do. Hmm? *“He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God”* (John 3:18). You see, it is the sin of omission that damns a man. It is failing to do what he ought to do that sends a man to Hell. And, don't tell me how good you are, how productive you are—the rest of it—because that's not going to save you, dear friend. It is faith in the crucified Son of God and in the shed blood that this young lady sang about that shall never lose its power. That's where the victory is. *“To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin”* (James 4:17). *“He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed”* (James 3:18).

There's a little card that sometimes goes around, and it's printed on both sides. On one side it says, “What must I do to be saved?” And, the answer is printed underneath it: *“believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved”* (Acts 16:31). On the other side is the question, “What must I do to be lost?” And, in bold black letters are these words: “nothing—nothing.” What do you have to do to be lost? Just do nothing—just stay as you are. Leave God out of your life. *“To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin”* (James 4:17).

Conclusion

Friend, do you know the Lord Jesus? “Oh,” you say, “I haven't opposed Him.” I'm not asking, “Have you opposed Him?” I'm asking, “Have you espoused Him? Have you received Him?” I believe the Lord Jesus Christ had rather have you out-and-out against Him than to have you neglect Him and forget Him. Someone wrote these words:

*When Jesus came to Golgotha, they hanged Him on a tree
They drove great nails in His hands and His feet, and they made a Calvary.
They crowned Him with a crown of thorns, red were His wounds and deep.*

For those were crude and cruel days, and human flesh was cheap.

*But when Jesus came to Memphis, they simply passed Him by,
They never hurt a hair of Him, they only let Him die;
For men had grown more tender, and they would not cause Him pain,
They only just passed down the street and left Him in the rain (author unknown).*

Are you guilty of that?

You see, Jesus said in Matthew chapter 12 and verse 30: *“He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad”* (Matthew 12:30). *“To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin”* (James 4:17).

One very moral, fine, astute businessman (in his own eyes) was speaking to a great preacher of the gospel, and that preacher was trying to bring that man to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And, that man reiterated the life that he lived, and looked into the face of that preacher, and said, “There’s the life that I have lived. I want to know what crime do you charge me with?” This preacher looked him right back in the eyes and said, “I charge you with the crime of high treason against your King.” High treason—that’s what it is. *“To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin”* (James 4:17).

Has there been a time in your life when you have bowed the knee to Jesus Christ? Has there been a time in your life when you have received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? You say, “Well, Brother Rogers, I need to do that. Yes, I do, and I’m going to do it.”

George W. Truett was at one time the great and noble pastor of The First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas. When he was a schoolboy, they were having a revival in his town. George Truett was already a Christian. He stopped by and asked one of his school chums to go to that revival with him. And, that schoolboy said to George Truett, “Not now, George. Later.” George Truett left him, decided the next day he would go by and invite the young man to the revival meeting. But, the next day, when George Truett went by, his mother said, “Well, I’m sorry. He can’t come out to the door right now. He’s been taken ill, and he’s in bed. You come back and see him the next day.” George Truett went back the next day, but his friend was not better—indeed, he was worse. And, the doctors were there, and there was a grave diagnosis. And, George couldn’t get in to see him.

The next day, when George Truett went by, the mother said with a face that was drawn and taunt, “George, the doctor says that if you want to see him alive, you must come in now.” And, George Truett, this great preacher of the gospel, told how as a lad he went into that sick room, and there was his friend, who, a few days ago, had seemed so vibrant and so healthy. There he was hardly being able to breathe—hardly being

able to speak. He was trying to communicate with George Truett. And, George Truett was himself just a little boy, but he said, "I leaned over the bed to try to hear what my friend was saying, because I could tell he was trying to speak to me." And, George said, "I listened, and then I understood what he was saying. He was saying, 'Not now, George. Later. Not now, George. Later.'" And, that's the way he died. George Truett said, "As a boy, I bowed my head and said, 'O God, I will spend the rest of my life urging men to receive Jesus Christ now and not to put it off.'"

God's Word says, "*Boast not thyself of to morrow*" (Proverbs 27:1). God's Word says, "*What is your life...[but] even a vapour, that appeareth for a little [while]*" (James 4:14). God's Word says, "*Behold, now is the day of salvation*" (2 Corinthians 6:2). "*To day, if [you] will hear [God's] voice, harden not your hearts*" (Hebrews 4:7).

Are you saved? You know, if I could receive the Lord Jesus Christ for you, I would, but I cannot. I've preached as best I know how, and I lovingly invite you to receive Christ. I want every head bowed.

The Sin of Omission

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: January 6, 1991

Main Scripture Text: James 4:17

“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

JAMES 4:17

Outline

Introduction

I. A Deceiving Sin

II. A Destructive Sin

III. A Defeated Sin

Conclusion

Introduction

I want to talk to you today on this subject, the sin of omission. Now, most of us think of sin as something that we do wrong. That is, we have a list of things that are wrong and we say, “Well, we better not do them.” Don’t lie, don’t steal, don’t kill, don’t commit adultery, don’t watch X-rated movies, don’t drink liquor, don’t do this, and don’t do that. And, we have a dirty dozen. We have an idea that if we don’t do those things, then we’re all right. But, I want you to notice what God’s Word says here in James chapter 4 and verse 17. James chapter 4 and verse 17: *“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin”* (James 4:17). The sin of failing to do what we ought to do. “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

Now, there are all kinds of sins, there are moral sins of the flesh, temperamental sins of the disposition, ethical sins of conduct, spiritual sins of pride, social sins of bigotry and prejudice, but the greatest sin, the sin of all sins, believe it or not, is none of these, but it is the sin of omission. Very frankly, all of these other sins come about because of the sin of omission. Because you see, the sin of omission is failing to do what you ought to do. No man can do two things at one time, and any man who is doing what he ought to do cannot do what he ought not to do. Isn’t that right? And so, all of these other sins of things that we ought not to do, happen because we’re not doing what we ought to do. And, the Bible says, “To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” Very clearly, with emphasis, I want to tell you, it’s a greater sin to fail to do what you ought to do than to do what you ought not to do, because if you’re doing what you ought

to do, you can't be doing what you ought not to do. "To him that knoweth..." I can't say that again, but it's true. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

What is the sin of omission? Well, let's back up and get the context for this passage of Scripture that we're reading here, in James chapter four he begins in verse 13: *"Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil"*—and remember what we've told you, whenever you see a therefore, see what it's there for. It refers back to what he's already said—*"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin"* (James 4:13–17).

I. A Deceiving Sin

Now, let me say three things about the sin of omission. Right? First of all, I want to say that it is a deceiving sin, a deceiving sin. You know, you see the sins of commission are easily seen, but the sin of omission is not as easily seen. To illustrate it, James gives us an illustration of a boastful businessman. He was a first century, wheeler-dealer, but he's got a lot of brothers that live in the twentieth century. I have an idea that it's right around January, or at least whatever the first of the year was for this man, so long ago. And, he's making his business plans for the coming year. I want you to see him now as he begins to think like so many of you have done, these early days, these opening days of this New Year. First of all, he plans the period of time. Look at him, and he says in verse 13: *"Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow, we will go into such and such a city, and continue there a year."* That is, he says, "Tomorrow, the next day, I'm going to begin my years work." I see him with his calendar now, and he's putting marks on his calendar. He says, "Well, let's see, today or tomorrow I'll do so and so. How long? Well, it'll take about a year to get this project done."

Not only is he planning the period, but he's planning the place. He says here that, "I will go to such a city." Now, he has his maps out there as well as his calendar. He's done his marketing research. He says, "That's the city, that's the place, that's where I'm going."

Well, not only does he plan the period and the place, he plans the procedure. He said, "This is what I'm going to do. I, on a particular time, am going to go to a particular place and here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to buy and I'm going to sell." You see, he may have had a degree in marketing from the University of Jerusalem. He said, "Now, this is a good place here, I really believe my product will go this year in that

place.” So, he’s got it all mapped up.

And, not only has he done that, he’s also planned the profit. He says, “I will buy and I will sell and I will get gain.” He’s got it all doped out. He’s got it all figured out. Do you say, “What did he do wrong?” Well, really nothing, really nothing. I mean, there’s nothing wrong with what this man was doing. The Bible is certainly not against planning. The Bible is not against thoughtfulness. The Bible is not against business. The Bible is not against hard work. And, the Bible is not against making money, as a matter of fact, it encourages all of those things. Just read the book of Proverbs. The book of Proverbs is a manual on all of those things, but as you read this story you find no mention of God, no prayer, no seeking the will of God, no honoring of God. He’s just a boastful businessman who is running his life as if God did not exist.

Now, the man who doesn’t believe in God is a fool, you’ll agree with that won’t you? I hope so; the Bible says, “*The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God*” (Psalm 14:1). But, may I tell you that there is a bigger fool than the man who doesn’t believe in God. The bigger fool is the man who does believe in God and then doesn’t live like it. I mean, he is a bigger fool than the man who doesn’t believe in God. The man who says, “There is a God,” and then completely leaves God out of his life; that’s what this man had done. Here is a man who is living as if God did not exist. And so, if you’d ask him, are you doing anything wrong? He’d just say, “No, I’m not doing anything wrong. Why, I’m doing everything right. I’ve got my calendar down here. I’ve got my sales charts here. I’ve got my market research here. I’m making a living for my family. I am doing everything that is good and decent and honorable.” He is condemned for what he failed to do. It is the sin of omission.

I mean, if you study the Bible, you’ll find out about the sin of omission. For example, Jesus one day was walking along and he was hungry and he saw a fig tree. It was a time for figs and there were no figs on that tree. It was barren. And, Jesus cursed it. It doesn’t mean that He used bad language against it, but He put a curse on that fig tree. The only thing that I know of that Jesus ever put a curse on, was a barren fig tree. Why did Jesus curse it? Because it bore poison fruit? No. Because it bore no fruit.

Remember the parable of the talents, where a king went away, or a landowner went away or a businessman, whatever he was, and he gave to his servants various talents. And, some of the servants invested talent and received revenue for their master, but one took his talent and buried it in the ground. When his master returned, he called him a wicked and a slothful servant. Had he wasted the money? Had he squandered the money? Had he stolen the money? No. He simply did nothing with it. And, for that reason, his Lord condemned him. It was the sin of omission. Jesus gave a parable about the Good Samaritan. Do you remember the story of the man who was going from Jerusalem down to Jericho and he fell among thieves. And, Jesus told the story of how

a priest and Levite passed him by. Now, did the priest and Levite rob that man? No. Did they beat that man? No. They just simply passed him by. All of these things illustrate what I'm trying to say to you. It is the sin of omission which is such a deceiving sin.

Most people have an idea that if they don't do certain things, then they're good Christians. If that's true, the dog I used to have is probably the best Christian I ever knew. He didn't steal, didn't drink liquor, and didn't do all of those other things. No, my friend, listen, listen, "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." My prayer before God, quite frankly, is that God will kick some of the self-righteousness out of some of us today. Some of us today who think that we're doing "quite well, thank you," because there are certain things we don't do. But to Jesus, to James, and the rest of the Bible, we must give records "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

I'll tell you something else about it. Not only is it a deceiving sin, but it's such a respectable sin. You don't know that God may have told me to pray for someone today, or that God may have told me to witness to someone today, or God may have told me to give something, or God may have told me to make restitution. You don't know that, see. But, you see, the sin of omission is such a respectable sin. Isn't it? Because we don't know how God is dealing with other people's hearts. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

II. A Destructive Sin

Now, I want to say, not only it is a deceitful sin, but it is a destructive sin, a destructive sin. Look in verses 15 and 16: "For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil." Why? Why is it so evil? What is wrong with this sin? Well, let's just think for a moment. Why are men and women, boys and girls lost and going to hell? Because of the sin of omission or the sin of commission? Well, let's get technical. Men, women, boys, and girls go to hell because of what they have done, the sin of commission. But, they fail to go to Heaven because of what they have not done. Men go to hell because of what they've done; their sin condemns them to hell. But, they miss Heaven because of what they've not done.

Now, you say, "What are you talking about?" Well, John chapter 3 verse 18: "*He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God*" (John 3:18). You see, a man doesn't go to hell today because he lies and steals and cheats and commits adultery, those sins have been paid for by the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. The sin that condemns a man today, the sin that that causes a man to go to hell today is not the sin of commission; it is the sin of omission. The Bible says, "He that believes is

not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already because he hath not believed.” Now, that tells me that no matter how outwardly righteous you may be today if you’ve not believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are, you are lost because of what you fail to do.

Years ago, I knew about a tract. On one side of the tract, it said, “What must I do to be saved?” And, underneath it said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” On the backside of the tract, it said, “What must I do to be lost?” And, underneath that there was nothing, just nothing. That’s exactly right. What must a man do to be lost? Do you have to burn down a church? Do you have to blaspheme God? Do you have to tear up a Bible? Do you have to do some heinous sin? No! Listen to the Scripture again, “He that believeth on Him,”—on Jesus—“is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” I’m talking about the destructiveness of this sin. It’s the reason men are lost. It’s the reason that so many of us have minds that are messed up. It’s the reason that so many are doing, what I call stinking thinking. It is because of the sin of omission.

You see, when God made your mind, God made your mind where it must think something. Have you ever been awake at night and couldn’t go to sleep, and try to put your mind in neutral? That’s the most difficult thing. You say, “Well, I won’t think of anything so I’ll go to sleep.” And, you’re thinking of not thinking of anything. I mean, it’s a, it’s a vicious trap, because God has made your mind where your mind must think something. I heard about a little boy in school, and a teacher asked him, “How do you spell vacuum?” “Well,” he said, “I’m not sure I can spell it, but I’ve got it in my head.” Now, dear friend, there is no vacuum in your head, you are going to be thinking something. And, if you are not thinking what is right, you are going to be thinking what is wrong. You see, the Bible says, “*Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good*” (Romans 12:21).

How do you keep from thinking wrong thoughts? By thinking right thoughts. “*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things*” (Philippians 4:8). Your mind is like a garden. Now, if you’ve ever planted a garden, I’ve only planted one in my life, and it didn’t work out and for this very reason. When you plant a garden, that’s not enough. It may be absolutely beautiful. You have got to weed the garden. You have got to weed the garden. If you don’t weed the garden, I mean, you don’t have to go out there and plant weeds in the garden. The weeds, I don’t know where they come from, they’re like fungus among us. They just they just come. The seeds, the spores are in the air and the weeds are going to be there. And,

my dear friend, I'm going to tell you if you don't keep the garden of your mind, your mind will become a garden of weeds. It is not the sin of commission, going to see X-rated movies so much, as it is the sin of omission, failing to saturate yourself with the Word of God. That's the reason it is so imperative that you have a quiet time with God every day. It's so imperative that you load up on the Word of God so that you can meditate on the Word of God.

Now, let me give you an example of what I'm talking about. How did King David get in trouble? Well, King David got in trouble in his mind before he got in trouble with Bathsheba. King David first of all lusted before he committed adultery. Well, why did he lust? Well, turn to Second Samuel chapter 11 for a moment. Let me show you something. The Bible says, and this is concerning David just before he committed adultery with Bathsheba. Second Samuel 11, beginning in verse 1: *"And it came to pass, after the year was expired..."*—now, underscore this—*"...at the time when kings go forth to battle..."* It was a time when he, as the commander and chief of the armies of Israel, should have been leading in the battle. *"...at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him..."* David said, "I'm going to get somebody to take my place, a surrogate." *...that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But..."* And, notice the word "but," the word "but," it doesn't say "and," it says "but." And, the word but is put there to show it is in contradistinction to what ought to be happening. *"But David tarried still at Jerusalem."* Look at the word "still." I mean, that evidently God has been dealing with him but he's still at Jerusalem. *"And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed..."* Do you know what evening tide is? Friend, that's when the sun is starting to set. Now, what's a man doing in bed at that time? I mean when he ought to be on the battlefield, and he's in bed. Doesn't sound like the David that I know and love. Doesn't sound like the great man of God, the warrior king. It's late in the afternoon, and here he is lolling in bed. He's in bed. *"...and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon"* (2 Samuel 11:1–2).

Now, have you ever heard it said that an idle mind is the devil's workshop? Do you know why David got in trouble? David got in trouble because he failed to be doing what he ought to be doing and therefore he was a snare for Satan. It was not aggressive lust. It was neglected duty. I am telling you, my dear friend, that the sin of omission is the root of all sin. It's the reason why many people have broken homes. Why are some marriages just coming apart, unraveling before our eyes? What does a man have to do to destroy his home? Does he have to beat his wife or curse her? No, just neglect her.

I heard about a man whose wife said, "Well you never tell me that you love me." He said, "Look, when we got married, I told you I loved you. If I change my mind, I'll let you

know.” Now, there are a lot of fellows who kind of feel that way. They fail to encourage their wives. My dear friend, you don’t fall in love. You grow in love. Love is not like a diamond, that once you have it, you just keep it and treasure it. Love is like a flower. It has to be cultivated. It has to be nurtured. It has to be watered. It has to be cared for. The reason that some of us have homes that are in deep trouble is not the sin of commission primarily, it is the sin of omission. Do you want your church to fail? What do you have to do? Start a church fuss. Get false doctrine into the church. Well, those things can hurt a church, but do you know how most churches are hurt? Not by sin of commission, but by sin of omission.

Let me give you another text. Here’s a text that a lot of people don’t understand. It’s Numbers Chapter thirty-two, and verse twenty-three. Moses is warning the tribes of Gad and Reuben. Now, let me tell you, before I read the text to you what is happening. The children of Israel are on their way into the Promise Land. And, when they’re on the east side of Jordan, they come to a beautiful place where the grass is real tall. The tribes of Gad and Reuben have cattle. And, they say, “You know Moses, you’re talking a lot about the promised land over on the other side of Jordan, over on the west bank, but we like it over here, on the east bank. It’s just beautiful. Look at this grass. I’ll tell you what we’d like to do Moses, we’d like to take our wives and our children, our cattle and all that we have, and we’ll just settle down here. We want this for our inheritance. Give us this land over here on the east side of Jordan.” Moses said, “Well, okay. If that’s what you want, you may have it. But,” he said, “I’m going to tell you something. In the land of Canaan, where your brothers are going, there are Canaanites and giants. There are wild beasts. There’s a battle that’s going to take place. And, you’re brothers are going across Jordan and they’re going to fight. Now, you can stay here, and you can have this piece of land if you want it. But, when the battle starts, you’re going to have to leave your cattle and your children and your wives and you’re going to have to come and fight with your brothers. And, then after the battle is won for Canaan, you can come back over here on the wrong side of Jordan and you can enjoy this property over here. But,” he said, “If you don’t come and fight with your brothers,” and here’s our text, right here, Numbers 32 verse 23: *“But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out”* (Numbers 32:23). Now, what was the sin? Failing to do what they ought to do. If you will not do so, “behold you have sinned against the Lord, and be sure your sin will find you out.” What is he saying? He’s saying that no man has a right to be at peace when his brothers are at war. When your brothers are over there fighting for the land of Canaan, you can’t just sit around and say, “Well, I’ve got what I want.”

Now, may I tell you my dear friend, that the tribes of Gad and Reuben have plenty of brothers who are alive in the twentieth century. There are plenty of members in this

church who are quite content to sit on the east side of Jordan while the members of this church fought to build these buildings, to raise the money, to get this job done to build this church. They just say, "Hey, we've got it made where we are. If they want to do it, just go ahead and do it. That's fine." If the other tribes want to go claim Canaan, let them go claim Canaan. We're fine just like we are on the wrong side of Jordan. I want to tell you dear friend, what Moses said. Moses said, "You belong to the people of Israel, and their battle, is your battle."

We have a lot of people today, members of this church. Oh, they enjoy this church. They want to eat the fat and drink the sweet. They want to sit on the wrong side of Jordan and they say, "Feed me pastor." They love Deeper Life Conferences. They love Bible conferences. They never win souls. They want the victories, but they don't want the battles. When the invitation is given, and I'll be pleading for souls, they'll be clock-watchers. They'll say, "Hey, I'm missing the cafeteria line." I mean, they enjoy the church. They enjoy the tall grass. They enjoy the wrong side of Jordan.

You see, my dear friend, what do you have to do to destroy the church? Do you have to fight the church? No. Just fail to do your part. And, if you fail to do your part, behold, you sin against the Lord. And, be sure your sin will find you out.

I heard about a man whose employer said to him, "You're fired!" He said, "Why? I didn't do anything." He said, "That's why you're fired. That's why you're fired."

Let me give you a parable. There was a man who lived in the twentieth century. His house was new. Two cars and a boat graced his garage and carport. A color television gleamed in his den. His family was healthy, and lo good fortune did smile upon him. As was his custom, when he was in town, when the fish were not biting, when he was not at the lake, when company did not come, when he could get up on time, when he was not too tired, when there was nothing else he could do, he went regularly to church. On these occasions, once every five to six weeks, he spent his time deploring the decaying state of the church. The Sunday school was low in its attendance. The choir was skimpy. The congregation was small. The offering was poor. And, the preacher was discouraged. "They ought to do better," he said. "What do they think this thing of religion is about anyway? Surely they could do better than this." So, vacation and days off came and went until many moons had passed. As it is in the way of the world, this man's children grew up. He knew that they did not go to the church, because they, down at the church had not interested them in religion. The man's health failed. One day he noticed something strange. They, down at the church, came by no more. They did not visit him in the hospital. Verily, verily he was angry. But, being a great heart, he decided he would forgive them and go to the church once more. But, behold, when he arrived, there was no church, only a 7-11 store. "Where is the church?" he demanded. "Dead" was the answer. "Oh," he moaned. "They should not have let it die." "Therefore to him that

knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

Those of you who are sitting here this morning, who do you think turns on these lights? Who do you think enlists these ushers? Who do you think takes care of the babies over in the nursery? Who do you think trains this choir? Who do you think pays the mortgage? Who do you think does this? Did you know there are people who think they do God a wild favor when they get here on Sunday and listen to a sermon? I mean, they say, “Hey, look, look, I got here.” My dear friend, a lot of folks are parking on somebody else’s nickel. Did you know that? Let me tell you something friend, “To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

You don’t have to fight to church. No man has a right to be at peace when his brother’s at war. This sin is such a destructive sin. It’s the reason that so many people are spiritual weaklings. I mean, we have folks today who rather than standing up against Satan, they’re just folding up. I mean, their lives, their families, everything is coming apart. And, you talk to them and say, “Well, I just don’t have the strength. I don’t know. I don’t understand. I don’t have the faith, I don’t have the fortitude, I don’t have the will. I just don’t have it. I just can’t do it. Other people seem to be able to do it, but I don’t.” Suppose you came to me and you say, “Pastor, I’m physically weak. I can hardly get one foot in front of another one. I can’t get out of bed in the morning. I just tremble all day long. I have no energy.” I say, “Well, my goodness man. Do you think you have some illness, some sickness?” He says, “Well, I don’t have any signs of an illness, but I’m just so weak.” I said, “Well, maybe it’s your diet, what are you eating?” “Well, I don’t eat anything.” I say, “What?” “I don’t eat anything.” “You don’t eat?” “Well, I eat on Sunday mornings when somebody feeds me a little bit. But, that’s all I eat.” “You mean, just once a week, on Sunday morning, you sit down and somebody feeds you a little pre-digested food.” “Yea, that’s all I eat. I’m just so weak.” “Well, no wonder you’re so weak.” I say, “Friend, you better get some nourishment or you’re just going to die.”

There are a lot of folks out here who say, “Well, I don’t understand why I’m so weak in my Christian life. After all I come to church every now and then and listen to pastor.” Friend, you better be getting up and feasting on the Word of God, day by day, spending that time alone with God in this book or you’re going to be anemic. Listen to this; it’s the reason that so many Christians are weak. It’s not the sin of commission. It’s the sin of omission, failing to do what you ought to do.

Somebody wrote these words, “Everyday in Africa, every morning, a gazelle wakes up. And, that gazelle knows if he can’t outrun the fastest lion, he’s going to die. Every morning in Africa a lion wakes up. And, that lion knows if he can’t outrun the slowest gazelle, he’s going to starve. And, so whether you’re a lion or whether you’re a gazelle, you wake up running. Because, if you don’t, you’re not going to make it.”

Now, my dear friend, let me tell you something. Your life is like that. You can’t just sit

around. Spurgeon said, “If you’re not seeking the Lord, the devil is seeking you. If you’re not seeking the Lord, judgment is on your heels.” You just can’t wake up and sit around spiritually.

III. A Defeated Sin

Well, let me go on to the third and final point of this simple message. I’m saying that this sin of omission, this sin of omission if number one, it my dear friend, is a deceitful sin. I mean, few of us realize we’re guilty of the sin of omission. It is a dangerous sin. It is the father sin, the mother sin of all other sin. Because if you’re doing what you ought to be doing, you cannot be doing what you ought not to be doing, but thank God it may be a defeated sin.

We can deal with the sin of omission. Look again here in the book of James chapter 4, verse 15: “For that ye ought to say if the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that.” Now, what you need to do, my dear friend, is to see every day as a gift from God, as we preached not long ago. And, in that in that day, you understand that God has a will for that day. And, you say, “Dear God, what do you want me to do? Lord God what is your will for me?” That’s again the quiet time. You don’t live your life as a practical atheist. “Lord what is your will? You’ve given me this day, if the Lord wills, I shall live and do this or that.”

Is there somebody God wants you to pray for? You see the Bible says, “*God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you*” (1 Samuel 12:23). You can’t pray for everybody, but God gives you prayer assignments. I have a prayer notebook, and in that prayer notebook, there are some names in that notebook. And, I pray for these people. I’d sin against God. It’s my duty; it’s my responsibility to pray. You have people, my dear friend, that if you’re not praying for, you’re sinning against God. You pray for your children? You pray for your pastor? Do you pray for your president? God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.

Has God told you to witness to someone? He will if you listen. Ezekiel chapter 3 verse 18: “*When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand*” (Ezekiel 3:18). Now, what does that mean? God says to you, “You go witness to that neighbor. You go witness to that business associate.” And, you don’t do it. You’re so lily-livered; you don’t go witness. You procrastinate.

Suppose a man is to be executed in the state of Tennessee. And, suppose Governor Ned McWherter pardons that man. And, suppose Governor Ned McWherter comes to you and says, “Here, I want you to deliver the pardon.” And, suppose you take that pardon and put it in your breast pocket and say, “I’ll do it.” Then a golf game comes, or

a business trip comes or a family reunion comes and then you pick up the newspaper and see that such and such a person is executed. You reach up there in your pocket and there's the pardon, it's already been signed. The man has already been pardoned, but you failed to deliver it. That man will die alright, but friend, you have bloody hands. Wouldn't you agree? You have bloody hands because simply you fail to deliver the message.

Now, you can't witness to everybody. There are five billion people. You can't witness to them all. You say, "Well, then it's not my fault." My dear friend, if you will get quiet and get alone with God and pray, and seek the face of God, I'll guarantee you, God will lay someone on your heart. Don't tell me it's not your fault. It is your fault. Number one, because you didn't even pray and seek the face of God. You say, "Well, I don't know the will of God." That's not the question. Are you seeking the will of God? Are you saying, "This is a day that you've given me. I want to know your will and I want to say, 'If the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that.'"

Is there somebody that God has asked you to go to and seek reconciliation with? Is there somebody that you need to forgive or somebody that needs your forgiveness? Dwight L. Moody said, "One sin with Christians, which is perhaps the most difficult of all to deal with is unforgiveness." I believe this sin is keeping more people from having power with God than any other thing." Is that your sin of omission? Just failing to go to that brother, that sister, and say, "I was wrong, or you're wrong, but whatever, let's get it right."

Has God told you to give something? I mean has God lain something on your heart? A while back God said to me, "Give thus and such to a certain person." I had no reason to give it to him. Well, very frankly, I'll tell you what it was. A hundred dollars I had in my pocket. And, God said, "Give it to him." I said, "I don't even know if he needs it." God said, "No difference, give it to him." "Well," you say, "Maybe it was autosuggestion." Well, maybe it was, but I didn't want to take a chance. You say, "You're bragging." I'm not bragging, I'm using it as an illustration, that's it. What I'm just simply saying to you my dear friend is, "Are you listening to God?" Are you listening to God? I mean, has God told you to pray? Has God told you to witness? Has God told you to give? Has God told you to reconcile? That's the way this sin is defeated. Listen, listen, listen. It is a greater sin to fail to do what you ought to do, than to do what you ought not to do.

I'm finished, but let me imagine you in a room right now. This room is filled with darkness, and you want to get the darkness out of the room, and you want to get the light into the room. All right, you see yourself here in this room now. Now, you want the light. You want light. But there's so much darkness in this room. How are you going to get the darkness out of this room? I mean can you can you talk the darkness out? Can you take a broomstick and beat the darkness out? Can you take a shovel and shovel

the darkness out? You say, “Of course not pastor.” How are you going to get the darkness out? My dear friend, it’s so simple. Just let the light in. Just open the doors, the windows, or turn that switch, and when the light comes, the darkness must go. It cannot stay. You cannot walk into any room and turn on the dark, as long as the light is there. But, you can walk into any room and turn on the light while the dark is there, and the darkness must flee.

Conclusion

Now, some of you are having difficulties living the way you ought. You say, “One of these days, I’m going to get my life right, and then I’ll be a Christian.” Do you know what you remind me of? You remind me of that man in that room, who said, “As soon as I get the darkness out of this room, I’ll let in the light.” Friend, give your heart to Jesus just like you are. I mean just like you are, all of the sin and darkness in your life, you’ll never get it out until you bring Jesus in. The Bible says, “Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.” The great sin in our lives is not the sin of commission. It’s not the darkness; it’s the failure to let in the light. “To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

I want every head bowed. While heads are bowed, I want to ask a question. How many of you know that you know, if you died today, you know if you died today, you know if you died today, you’d go straight to Heaven? May I see you hand? Hold it up. You know it. You absolutely know it. Praise God. Now, if you couldn’t lift your hand. Or, if you lifted your hand, but your conscience smitten, and your conscience said that you shouldn’t lift your hand, I want to pray for you today, that you might know Jesus as your personal Savior. Father God, for these who have doubts, I know dear Lord, that they in their own way love and respect you, or they would not be here in the house of God today. But, I pray dear God, that rather than just struggling against the dark and trying not to do wrong, that they might just open their hearts and let in the light of the Lord Jesus today. Oh, God that they might be saved by trusting Christ, in His name I pray, Amen.

Is Your Pocketbook Converted?

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: August 27, 1978

Main Scripture Text: James 5:1–8

*“Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.
Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten.”*

JAMES 5:1–2

Outline

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- II. The Wickedness of Sinful Wealth
- III. The Wantonness of Selfish Wealth
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Introduction

Would you turn to your Bibles... By the way, how many Bibles today? Would you hold them up? Let me just see them. Brother! Television man, get a copy of that, would you? I want our people to see (the people who are watching) that you people bring your Bibles to the house of God. Thank you. Turn to James chapter 5—James chapter 5. We’re continuing through our journey with James, and we’re seeing what Pastor James has to say to the 20th Century church. Today, as we’ve already told you, we’re speaking on this subject in the form of a question: “Is Your Pocketbook Converted?”

I’m beginning in verse 1: James says, *“Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth”—that literally means “the Lord God of Hosts”—“Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and [had] been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you. Be patient therefore, brethren, [for] the coming of the Lord.*

Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh” (James 5:1–8).

Once there was a Baptist who had a pious look.

He had been totally immersed except his pocketbook.

He put a dollar in the plate and sang with might and main.

When we asunder part, it gives us inward pain (author unknown) .

Now, I think that there are many who can identify with that today. They claim to be saved, and yet somehow their so-called conversion experience has never reached their pocketbook. These are the people to whom James is speaking—and well he might, because the measure of a man is often seen by his attitude toward money. You can measure a man’s faith, a man’s character, a man’s religion, by his attitude toward money. For this realm of stewardship is not only the way that men make money, but it is also the way that God makes men. And, God is not in the business of raising money; God is in the business of growing men. And, I have observed that often—often—more people are ruined by prosperity than are ruined by adversity. It seems to be that sometimes people can stand anything but success, and they climb higher, and higher, and higher, and higher until they finally fall over the pinnacle of their prosperity. And, God was not able to trust them with riches. There are four things I want you to see that James speaks of as he tells us about a man’s relationship to money.

I. The Worthlessness of Stagnant Wealth

First of all, James speaks of the worthlessness of stagnant wealth—the worthlessness of stagnant wealth. Notice the first three verses: *“Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days” (James 5:1–3).*

Look at that word *treasure*. It’s the same word that we get *thesaurus* from, which means “a collection.” Here are people who are collecting money like some people collect stamps. Here are people who are collecting goodies, and wealth, and gold, and diamonds, and gems, and clothes, and finery. They don’t collect it because they need it; they just get it ’cause they want it. And, James is speaking about people who have heaped together treasure. He’s not talking, necessarily, about money that is working; he’s not even talking about money that is invested, but money that is collected for money’s sake—wealth that is held just for the joy of holding it, just money that is heaped up, money that is salted down, money that is hoarded, money and wealth that is taken out of circulation.

Now, James is not warning against money per se. As we're going to see in a moment, it's not a sin to be rich. No, that's not what James is warning about. But, we're going to see that James is warning, number one, about a wrong attitude toward money; number two, a wrong way of securing money; and then, the misuse of money after a person has secured it by whatever means. You see, the Bible doesn't teach that it's a crime to have money. So many times people misquote the Bible. They say, "Well, the Bible says that money is the root of all evil." No, the Bible doesn't say that. The Bible says, "*The love of money*"—"the love of money"—"*is the root of all [kinds of] evil*" (1 Timothy 6:10). You can be very poor and have the love of money, you see. You don't have to be a rich man to commit that sin, and you may be a rich man and not have that inordinate covetous love of money. Many of God's best stewards are very rich people. The Bible does not condemn wealth per se.

Let me give you some illustrations of what I'm talking about. For example, Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, sometimes called *the father of the faithful*, was a very wealthy man. Genesis chapter 13 and verse 2: the Bible says, "*[He] was very rich in...silver, and in gold*" (Genesis 13:2). King David, a man after God's own heart, a wonderful man, a godly man, a man who feared God—the Bible describes his death. First Chronicles chapter 29, verse 28: the Bible says, "*He died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour*"—"he died in a good old age, full of...riches, and honour" (1 Chronicles 29:28). And, God loved David. David was a man after God's own heart.

The man in whose tomb the Lord Jesus Christ was laid was a believer. His name was Joseph of Arimathaea, and the Bible tells us in Matthew chapter 27 and verse 57 that he was a rich man (Matthew 27:57). And, Bible scholars tell us that they believe that Mary, Martha, and Lazarus probably were affluent people, where Jesus spent much of His time. Barnabas was probably a rich man. Job was a very rich man, a just man, an upright one that has feared God. And so, the Bible does not just simply say that it is wrong to have wealth—not at all. As a matter of fact, the Bible says, "*It is [the Lord thy God] that giveth thee power to get wealth*" (Deuteronomy 8:18). And also, the Bible says, "*The LORD...hath pleasure in the prosperity of His [servants]*" (Psalm 35:27). So, James is not talking about wealth per se, but he's talking about money that is heaped together, hoarded up, salted down, loved, just for the sake of money. It is an attitude that James is talking about of ruthless greed. It says, "Get all you can. Can all you get. Sit on the lid, and poison the rest." And, there are people who have that attitude. They just gather it. They heap it. They hoard it. "It's mine," they say. And, they love it for money's sake.

The Bible calls that *covetousness*. Luke chapter 12 and verse 15: "*And he said unto them*"—"Jesus] said unto them"—"*Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things [that] he possesseth*" (Luke

12:15). It is one thing, friend, for you to possess an abundance of things, but it's quite another thing for an abundance of things to possess you. And, Jesus warned against the sin of covetousness. Paul said in the Book of Colossians, chapter 3 and verse 5 that "*covetousness...is idolatry*" (Colossians 3:5). Now, if we were to catalogue the sins, you would say murder is a bad sin, rape is a terrible sin, arson is a wicked sin. But, God says that "*covetousness...is idolatry*" (Colossians 3:5), and there is no greater sin than idolatry. God says, "*I am the LORD thy God... Thou shalt have no other gods before me*" (Exodus 20:2–3). And so, here God warns against an inordinate love of money.

In my research, I came across a story about one of the richest ladies who ever lived in America. Her name was Hetty Green—H-E-T-T-Y. She was said to have been worth over one hundred million dollars, and that's when a hundred million was a hundred million. But, let me tell you how she lived. Oh, Hetty, rather than buying new clothes, would take newspapers and stuff them inside of her clothes in the winter time to keep from getting cold. Now, here's a woman with a hundred million dollars. Why, when she would buy a newspaper, after she would read it, she would resell it—resell a newspaper! She would never buy a Pullman berth, you know, where you can lie down and sleep. And, on a railroad, she would travel coach—set up all night nodding, rather than pay the extra money for a Pullman berth.

Why, she spent nights up in the attic of her factories sorting through rags, taking the white rags and putting them over here and the colored rags over here, because she had found out that she could get a penny a pound more for the white rags. And so, all night, here she is sorting rags. Why, she had some businesses in New York City; but rather than buying a house in New York City, she would rent a tenement—a flat—under an assumed name so she wouldn't have to pay income tax. And, when the dear little old lady died, they had to put ladies there to take care of her in ordinary street clothes, because she would have died early if she'd thought they were hiring a registered nurse to take care of her. And so, no one could wear a nurse's uniform in her presence.

Now, what was wrong with this woman? Well friend, money was her master. She lived for it. She worshiped it. She hoarded it. And, that is a sin. Money is to work for us; we are not to worship it. And, you see, there's a principle that God does not want treasure heaped up; God wants treasure spread out. God does not want people to hoard money; God wants people to use money. And, if you're one of these hoarders, if you're one of these collectors, you're going to have to face God with it one of these days.

Now, it's fine for a man—a businessman—to have money that he is investing, and constantly expanding his business, and using the proceeds from that, for that business to serve mankind. That's quite wonderful. But, when a man is just simply getting the attitude of greed—"I am hoarding it up. I am laying it by. I am salting it down. It is

rusting. The moths are getting it. The mildew is taking it. Decay is diminishing it”—God says that’s a sin that a man will have to answer for at the Judgment.

You see, God wants His wealth in circulation. Jack Taylor in his book, *God’s Miraculous Plan of Economy*, has pointed out this idea of the cycle of giving. And, God has said that all of nature teaches that we are to give. And, as we get, we give; and as we get we give, we get. And, there is a cycle that God built into nature of reciprocal beneficence—receiving and giving, and receiving and giving. And, this is the way God created this world in the beginning. In the beginning, in the Garden of Eden, there was plenty of everything for everybody. And, there was a law written in nature, and that law said, “Give, give, give.” The sun gave, the earth gave, the trees gave, the birds gave, the animals gave, the flowers gave of their fragrance—everything gave. Man gave. And, that’s the way we were to live—by giving and, therefore, by getting, and then by giving and keeping everything in circulation. But then, sin came in, and the theme is no longer “give, give, give,” but “get, get, get.” And, man, rather than being a gracious giver, became a greedy getter. And then, things begin to change.

You see, a bell is not a bell until you ring it. A song is not a song until you sing it. A joy is not a joy until you share it. Love is not love until you give it away, and wealth is not really wealth until it is circulated. What good is wealth that is not spent? What good is it? It is heaped together. It is treasured up, but it does no one any good. It has been taken out of circulation. It is not being used for that which God wants it to be used for.

Take your pen and write in your margin “Ecclesiastes 5:13,” and listen to this verse. You may turn to it if you like. Ecclesiastes chapter 5 and verse 13: “*There is a [great] evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt*”—“*riches kept [by] the owners thereof to their hurt*” (Ecclesiastes 5:13). Now friend, sometimes God gives you riches, but God doesn’t necessarily give you riches to keep them but to share them. It is the Lord Jesus... You say, “Well, if I gave them away, then I wouldn’t have them any longer.” Well, perhaps so. You give them with the wrong attitude. But, Jesus said in Luke chapter 6, verse 38: “*Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together...shall men give into your bosom*” (Luke 6:38).

You see, money that is not used corrupts. Notice what James is saying here. Look in verse 2: “*Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you*” (James 5:2–3). Here he’s talking about wealth that someone else could use. You don’t use it; they don’t use it. No one uses it. It’s just sitting there rusting. It is sitting there being mildewed. It is doing no one any good. I tell you, there’s enough stored up treasure in the houses of God’s people to revolutionize our world—things that people will never use. Sometimes they’ll curse their children with a legacy of wealth that those children are not able to

handle, rather than getting that business to work for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, you say, well, Brother Rogers, you're sure not talking to me because I don't have any. As a matter of fact, the only thing I have is too much month at the end of the money. Well, maybe—you know, there's more than one kind of wealth—maybe you have a wealth of physical strength. Maybe you have a wealth of Bible knowledge. Maybe you have a wealth of influence. Maybe you have a wealth of prayer power. Now, don't just look down your long nose at the rich man who may be holding back, dear friend, if you're not giving all you have to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Back many years ago in England, there was a shortage of silver, when Oliver Cromwell was in charge. And, someone came to Cromwell, and they said, "There's no silver. We can't mint any more coins until we get some more silver." He said, "Is there no silver at all?" They said, "Well, the only silver we can find is in the statues in the churches—the images of the saints." Cromwell said, "Very well, then. We'll melt the saints down and put them into circulation." Amen? Now, that's exactly what needs to be done. I think there are some of us who need to be melted by the Holy Spirit and put into circulation for the Lord Jesus Christ.

An unused well becomes stagnant. A tool that is not used will rust. A sponge that is not used will harden. What is it that you have that you're not investing for the Lord Jesus Christ? Get it out; use it. Pretty soon we're going to have a time for our preacher boys here at Mid-America Seminary, and we're going to try to take some of the furniture and the goods that you have in your house that you're not using, and some of the clothing and other things, and transfer it into the hands of these preacher boys who are working there way through school.

Do you have a piece of furniture sitting out in the garage that you're not going to use—a refrigerator or something like that? I'm not talking about a piece of junk. You know, so often we give something away. We give that box of oatmeal that's been sitting under the drainpipe in the sink that the water's dropped on. I'm not talking about that. They don't want your junk; they don't need it. But, do you have something that's not being used? Have clothes in your closet—you just don't wear them anymore but you just keep them there? You can't bear to part with them. You have something just sort of... my soul... Get that stuff out, and get it working for the Lord Jesus Christ. Put it in the hands of somebody who can use it. Don't let it rust. Don't let the moths get it. Don't let the mildew get it. James is speaking of the worthlessness—the worthlessness—of stagnant wealth.

II. The Wickedness of Sinful Wealth

But then, the next thing James talks about is the wickedness of sinful wealth. Look in verse 4: "*Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is*

of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth" (James 5:4). Verse 6: *"Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you"* (James 5:6). Here James is talking about not only hoarding up wealth, but he's talking about getting wealth the wrong way. He's talking about people who use their wealth and use their position to oppress the poor. I want you to know that God is always on the side of the oppressed—of the oppressed. God loves the oppressed. And, the Bible says that God watches over the fatherless and God watches over the widows.

You see, back in this time they had no labor laws. They had no labor unions. They had none of these other things, and all the laborer could do was just simply take it on the chin. And, here was a rich landowner who had thousands of acres. Here's another man with no place to work except on that man's farm—no way to get food. And so, the man says, "All right, you come and work for me." And, at the end of the day when he was to be paid, the owner just decided he wasn't going to pay him. Maybe he said, "You didn't work hard enough." Maybe, "You got here late." Maybe, "You quit soon. I don't like the way you plowed that furrow. I'm not going to pay you today." And, this man is depending upon that day's work for his food to feed his children—his babies.

You see, in the Bible, the Bible says a man was to be paid at sundown. See, they didn't have banks and things like we had. It wasn't payday some day; it was payday every day—every day. But, here's a man, because he has power and because he can control the courtrooms... Look in verse 6: *"Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you"* (James 5:6). They were able to condemn them in courts and even sometimes have a slave sentenced to death simply because of the ruthless power of their wealth. And so, James is speaking not only here of the wastefulness of stagnant wealth, but he talks about the wickedness of sinful wealth—getting wealth by the wrong means, whatever it may be. Whether you be in the ungodly liquor business, whether you be in the business of gambling, whether you be in the business of prostitution, whether you be in the business of pornography, or whether you be in a so-called legitimate business that takes the weight and the strength of your wealth to bully someone else, I want you to know that one day you'll face God about it—you'll face God about it. The wickedness of sinful wealth.

III. The Wantonness of Selfish Wealth

Now, I want you to notice the third thing that James speaks about. James also speaks not only of the worthlessness of stagnant wealth and the wickedness of sinful wealth, but James also speaks of the wantonness of selfish wealth. Look in verse 5: *"Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and [have] been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter"* (James 5:5).

Now, what does that word *wanton* mean? It means to be malicious, or to live in riotousness, or to live in excess. The Bible does not teach that a man cannot enjoy what he has. As a matter of fact, the Bible teaches that a man is to enjoy the fruit of his hands. He is to enjoy his home. He is to enjoy his wife. He's to enjoy his food. He's to enjoy all of this. God enjoys our enjoying His gifts. *"Every good gift and every perfect gift...cometh down from the Father of lights, [in] whom [there's] no variableness, [nor] shadow of turning"* (James 1:17). No, the Bible is not against you having legitimate pleasures. The Bible is not against you having recreation. The Bible is not against you having rest. The Bible is not against you having a good warm meal and beautiful clothes—no, not that. But, the Bible is against what it calls a *wantonness*—the wantonness of selfish wealth. What is this? This is a person who lives in riotousness excess. This is a person who is like a hog being fattened for the slaughter. Here's a person who is living for self-gratification. He never thinks of others. He is just simply living in pleasure. He's wanton; he is nourishing his heart as in a day of slaughter, like a pig being fattened for the slaughter.

Are you selfish with what you have? Are you just simply living in selfishness and greed, pampering your body and not caring for others? Sure, God expects you to care for you. Sure, God expects you to take care of your children. *"[For] if [a man] provide not for his own, [especially] those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and [he's] worse than an infidel"* (1 Timothy 5:8). But, are you simply spending an excess in lascivious, wantonness, in luxurious riotousness, in frivolity, wastefulness, using things that could be for the glory of our Lord? If you are—you say, "That's the way to happiness"—but I say to you, "That's the way of misery." You'll never find happiness in things. People who live for things are in the junk business.

John D. Rockefeller, one of the richest men who ever lived in the history of this world, was dying at the age of 55. He was living on crackers and milk, most of the time in bed. He had not enjoyed one hour of uninterrupted sleep in five years. He was hungry, but he couldn't eat. He was miserable, but he had no apparent recourse except to die a slow death. He had a blood disease that racked his body with pain. He had ulcers that kept him from eating. And, the doctors said, "Rockefeller, you're going to die." Well, he got to thinking, and he said, "Well, if I'm going to die, before I die, I might as well do some of the things I want to do." And, he started doing one thing that, up until this time, he'd never done much of. And, this one thing, he said, transformed his life, and changed his life, and restored his health so that he lived for 35 more years. Do you know what it was? He began to give. That's it. He just started to give. And, he started not putting an emphasis primarily upon making money, but upon giving money—not primarily of securing things, but making others happy. Here was a divine metamorphosis that took place in his life, and he was transformed by his own testimony.

And, he virtually was made well and spent the rest of his life a whole man.

Oh, dear friend, the wantonness—the wantonness—of selfish wealth! How foolish to be selfish!

IV. The Wiseness of Sanctified Wealth

Now, the fourth and final thing I want you to notice—I want you to notice the wiseness of sanctified wealth—the wiseness of sanctified wealth. In the light of all of this warning, shouldn't we be wise, and shouldn't we take what wealth we have, whether it be wealth of personality, wealth of influence, wealth of physical strength, wealth of prayer power, wealth of money, wealth of property—whatever it is—and shouldn't we invest it for the cause of Christ?

A. The Day of Reckoning Is Coming

Wise for two reasons—listen: first of all, there's the day of reckoning. Secondly, there's the day of reward. Both are coming. James speaks of the day of reckoning. Look in the first several verses again of chapter 5: *“Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you”* (James 5:1). What miseries was he talking about? Friend, in about ten years from the time James had written this book to the rich people of Jerusalem, Jerusalem was invaded by the Romans. Titus, the Roman general, brought his armies around Jerusalem, surrounded Jerusalem, set siege against Jerusalem. Jesus also knew it would happen. Jesus wept over Jerusalem. James knew that it was going to happen, and here were these people with all of these treasures heaped up. And, they thought that they were going to keep them, but James knew what was going to happen. James knew that the miseries were going to come. One million Jews died in that slaughter. But, let me tell you who the first victims were. Do you know who the first victims of the pillage were? Did you know who the first victims of the riots were? Did you know who the first targets for the looters and the murderers were? These rich people—they were the ones to whose home they went first. The looters and the murderers sought them out, and they had all of the treasure...they had it all heaped up.

But, James could see the miseries that were coming—the impending dangers that were coming. Now, what am I saying? Wouldn't it have been wise if they had taken some of that wealth and invested it in the cause of righteousness and revival to hold back the hand of God in judgment? You see, I'm just afraid that if some of us Americans don't invest our money in things that count, the Communists will have it anyway. I wonder how long America has. I wonder if we're just simply living in a fool's paradise—getting it, hoarding it, trying to keep it. And, the whole time civilization as we know it is crumbling around us.

Not only—listen—James is speaking of the day of reckoning, not only that

immediate day, but that final day at the judgment. Go on to read—look: *“Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you”* (James 5:3). When that unsaved man comes to the Judgment, he stands before Almighty God, and God says to him, “All right, witness number one, step forward.” And, who steps forward but Mr. Rusty Riches. And, he says, “That was the man right there. That was the man who was blessed with wealth and abundance, but he kept it, hoarded it for himself.” God says, “It’ll be as a witness against you” (James 5:3).

And oh, listen—there’s another witness that will come. Look there, if you will, in verse 4: *“[And] behold, the hire of labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth”* (James 5:4). There’s another witness—those who have been defrauded, those who have been cheated. They will stand up, and voices will have voices that will witness in that Day of Judgment. Oh, there’s a Judgment Day coming, and the wiseness of sanctified wealth tells us that we are in the light of the impending doom and the coming judgment, that we ought to invest our money in the things that count.

B. The Day of Reward Is Coming

Not only does he speak of the day of reckoning, but also, dear friend, he speaks of the day of reward. Look, if you will, in verse 8: *“Be ye also patient”*—strike that. Go back to verse 7—*“Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh”* (James 5:7–8). Isn’t that a wonderful promise?

Friend, listen—I want to tell you something: I believe that Jesus is coming soon. I believe you ought to believe *“the coming of the Lord draweth nigh”* (James 5:8). We don’t know. Even in James’s time they were expecting Jesus to come. The Apostle Paul expected Jesus to come. We ought to be living every moment as though Jesus were coming. Now, I want to ask you, if Jesus Christ is coming—perhaps this afternoon—don’t you think that you ought to have your life’s influence in wealth working for Him?

Must I go, and empty-handed?

Must I meet the Savior so?

[Without] one soul with which to greet Him,

Must I empty-handed go? (Charles C. Luther).

You see, there’s coming a day of reward.

Now, sometimes it’s hard for a farmer to put his seed in the ground. You know, here’s a farmer, and he’s got a certain amount of grain; and he’s going to put it out there in the ground and let it die and rot. And, his wife would say to him, “Honey, that’s such a

waste of that grain. Let's you and I just eat it." But, the farmer, very wise, says, "No, we eat some of it because we have to live, but we're going to take the rest of it and we're going to put it in the ground. For I know something—that if we put it in the ground and if we wait, it will spout. And, we'll have more than we have right now, if we will invest it. *'For [what] a man [sows], that shall he also reap'*" (Galatians 6:7).

Now, I want you to notice what James says. Look at it—look in verse 7: *"Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman"*—that means "the farmer"—*"waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh"* (James 5:7–8). Oh, my dear friend, what we invest for the Lord Jesus Christ is never lost! What man puts in the soil of service for Christ will bring forth the fruit of righteousness. "It pays to serve Jesus. It pays every day" (Frank C. Huston). We need to learn how to live for eternity. We need to learn how to make investments. There's coming a time, if we'll be patient, when Jesus will come. And, just as a farmer waits for his crop, we need to wait for the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, who said, *"Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be"* (Revelation 22:12).

Friend, we've often heard it said—"You can't take it with you"—and that's true. You can't take it with you. But, I've got good news for you: while you can't take it with you, you can send it on ahead. Did you know that? You really can. Jesus said, *"Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven"* (Matthew 6:20). While you're down here, you can be sending it up there constantly—just sending it up, laying it up. Isn't that neat? Isn't that wonderful? Treasure in Heaven.

Well, how can you get your money to Heaven? Well, the only way I know that you can get your money to Heaven is to invest it in something going to Heaven. And, what's the only thing going to Heaven? The souls of men. You see, you invest your money and the only commodity going to Heaven, the souls of men, and that's the way to transfer your wealth from here to there. I think that's pretty wonderful. I think that's a wonderful deal—that you can send it on ahead.

Turn to Luke chapter 16. Let me show you a very remarkable story in Luke chapter 16. We're talking about the principle of sending it on ahead. *"And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a [servant]; and the same was accused unto him that he wasted his goods"*—now, this rich man had a business manager, and somebody said the business manager is not doing a good job—*"And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward"*—that is, in plain English, "You're fired." All right then—*"The steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig"*—why, he, you know, he didn't have

enough physical strength. He'd been a bookkeeper most of his life, and he couldn't get out and get a shovel—*“[and] to beg, I am ashamed”* (Luke 16:1–3). Too weak to work—to proud to beg.

All right, so this is what he said: *“I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, [that] they may receive me into their houses”*—he said, “I’ve got to have a place to go, and I’m going to have some people take care”—*“So he called every one of his lord’s debtors unto him”*—that is, “the boss’s debtors,” the ones who owed the boss some money—*“and said unto the first, How must owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty”*—he said, “We’ll just cut your bill in half, and then you and I will be real good friends”—*“Then he said to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore”* (Luke 16:4–7)—“just write 80 measures of wheat. We’ll just give you a deduction of 20 measures of wheat.”

Now, notice the boss found out what he did. Now, you think the boss would be angry—and he was. But, the boss still had to back off and take off his hat to him. Look: *“And the lord commended the unjust [doer]”*—that is, “his boss”—*“because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light”* (Luke 16:8). A lot of people say, “I sure don’t understand that. That guy was a scoundrel. He was a rascal. He was dishonest. He was knocking down on the boss, and he was making friends with the boss’s debtors.” Now, the lord did not commend him for his dishonesty (his boss), but when his boss found out about it, he said, “Well, one thing I’ve got to tell you: you’re a pretty shrewd fellow. You’re a pretty smart fellow.” His master did not commend him for his dishonesty, but he had to admire his shrewdness and his wisdom.

And then, Jesus said, *“For the children of this world are [wiser] in their generation...than the children of light”* (Luke 16:8). And then, He gave us some great advice, and here’s the advice. I want every one of us to listen to it in the light of this parable. *“And I say unto you”*—unto Christians—*“You make [friends] to yourselves...[with the] unrighteous”* (Luke 16:9). That word “of” should be translated “with”—“with the unrighteous, with the mammon of unrighteousness.” (“You take money, and just as that unjust steward made friends for himself, you take money and you make certain kind of friends with your money. You use your money to buy friends.”) What kind of friends? Well, let’s go on and continue to read.

Look in verse 9: *“And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail”*—that is, “when you leave here.” Friend, go on and read, that—*“they”*—who? The friends—*“may receive you into everlasting habitations”* (Luke 16:9). What is Jesus saying? It’s very obvious: Jesus is saying, “You can’t stay

here forever. Pretty soon, you're going to have to cash in." And so, Jesus is saying, "Can't you be as wise spiritually as an unjust person is wise in the world? Can't you take your money and make some friends and some people to receive you, that when you go to Heaven, they'll be a welcoming committee up there to receive you?" People who are in Heaven because you took your money and you used your money to win souls. You invested your money in the only thing going to Heaven, and you made friends with unrighteous mammon, with money, that, when you fail, the ones you've won will receive you into Heaven.

Friend, when you get to Heaven, is there going to be a welcome party there for you? Are they going to say, "Because you lived as God would have you live, because you knew the wisdom of biblical stewardship, there are some who are going to receive you into everlasting habitation"? You say, "Well, Brother Rogers, you really gave it to the rich people today." Friend, let me tell you something: don't tell me what you would do with a million dollars if you had it. The real test of your spirituality is what you're doing with the 20 dollars you have.

Conclusion

Jesus said, "He [who] is faithful in that which is least [shall be] faithful also in [that which is] much" (Luke 16:10). Did you know that all of us who live in America are wealthy compared to most of the people in the world? Did you know that? We're going to face the Lord.

*Must I go, and empty-handed?
Must I meet my Savior so?
[Without] one soul with which to greet Him,
Must I empty-handed go? (Charles C. Luther).*

*[Though you] carve your name high [above the] shifting sand,
Where the steadfast rocks defy decay—
All you can hold in your cold, dead hand
Is what you have given away (George White McDaniel).*

Let's pray.

A Man and His Money

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: November 8, 1987

Main Scripture Text: James 5:1–9

“Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.”

JAMES 5:9

Outline

Introduction

- I. How a Man Saves His Money
- II. How a Man Secures His Money
- III. How a Man Spends His Money
- IV. How a Man Shares His Money

Conclusion

Introduction

I want to talk to you about a subject. That's on every body's mind and that's the subject of money. We've heard a lot about money these last several days and the things that have been happening in the stock market. I know that many you are interested in money. If you say that you are not I have a tendency to believe that you are not telling the truth. All people are interested, most all people I believe to some degree. And, you can tell a lot about a man's character by his reaction to money whether it be in plenty or whether it be in poverty.

I heard about a man who came into a large inheritance, several hundred thousand dollars. It was such a great amount of money that the man was old and had a bad heart they thought they better not tell him that he had so much money just bluntly because they thought he might have a heart attack. They said, “Well, the preacher is good with words, we'll ask the preacher to tell him.” And, so the minister went over to tell him. The minister thought rather than telling him just straight out he'd kind of ease into it. So he put, rather than a statement, he put a question to the old man, and he said, “Grandpa, what would you do if you had two hundred thousand dollars?” He said, “Pastor, I would give it all to the building fund.” The pastor fainted.

Now, you can tell what a man's attitude is and a lot about his character by his relationship to money. There are a lot of deceptions about money. A lot of people have some wrong ideas about money.

Some people think that money brings happiness. It doesn't. It can buy almost anything but happiness. Take you almost anywhere but Heaven. Other people think money brings security. It doesn't. Other people think that money is sinful. It isn't. It is a necessary means of exchange. The Bible doesn't say that money is the root of all evil contrary to popular opinion. *"For the love of money is the root of all evil..."* (1 Timothy 6:10). There are a lot of deceptions about money. There are a lot of disagreements about money and you can get criticized more over money matters than almost anything else.

If a man runs after money he's called *money-mad*. If he keeps it he is called a *miser*. If he spends it he is called a *playboy*. If he doesn't get it he is called a *ne'er-do-well*. If he gets it without working for it he is a *parasite*. If he doesn't try to get it he is *without ambition*, and on, and on, and on. A lot of disagreements about money, a lot of disasters concerning money. Right here in our own congregation, our city, and our nation there are some real financial disasters.

As a matter of fact, I read a statistician and a marriage counselor who said that "Money is the source of eighty-nine percent of all family discord and arguments." Eighty-nine percent. Now, whether that is true or not I can't really prove, but even if it approximates that the same statistician and counselor has said that eighty percent of all divorces have money mismanagement at their sources. Eighty percent of divorces, and it is probably your attitude toward money and not the amount of money that really matters.

If you can't manage on little you wouldn't be able to manage on much. And, that next raise that you are hoping that you will get that will get you out of your financial distress may only open the gate to wider and greater debt if you don't know how to handle your money. Let's see what the Bible has to say about wealth today because it is very pertinent with the love offering that's coming this coming Sunday.

Now, I want to tell you one more time that a man's character and a man's religion and a man's spirituality may be measured by his attitude toward money more than anything else.

Somebody once said that, "Stewardship is that area of life that tells how men make money and how God makes men." So, we are going to be talking about a man and his money, or if you please, a woman and her money.

I. How a Man Saves His Money

The very first thing I think that God is interested in so far as our wealth is concerned is, or our money is how a man saves his money. Let's look in chapter 5 verse 1: *"Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is*

cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days" (James 5:1–3). Here James is talking about how a man saves his money. There are some people who just treasure up money. The word *treasure* is the word we get our word "thesauruses" from and it actually means "a collection." Some people collect money like other people collect stamps. I mean, they have money—not necessarily money that they are going to need for retirement, or money they are going to need for the future—but money that is kept for money's sake.

What James is talking about here is stagnant wealth. Wealth that has been heaped up, wealth that has been salted down, wealth that has been hoarded, the Bible condemns. God wants us, I am certain, to save money. The Bible tells us to "*Go to the ant... and be wise*" (Proverbs 6:6). And, the ant saves a certain amount for the future, etcetera. And, the Bible talks about leaving an inheritance. God wants us to save money. I believe that with all my heart that the saving of money is not wrong, but wise. But, the Bible warns against hoarding money, treasuring money, keeping wealth beyond that which is proper and that which is right. That is loving money for money's sake. Again, I remind you that the Bible says, "The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10).

Now, the Bible does not condemn wealth. Some people think that the Bible condemns wealth, but the Bible does not. As a matter of fact, the Bible says that, "*...it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth...*" (Deuteronomy 8:18). And, you can study the Bible and you can find some of God's saints have been wealthy. For instance, the Bible said Abraham in Genesis chapter 13 and verse 2: "*And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold*" (Genesis 13:2). Yet he was the father of the faithful—"...very rich...in silver, and in gold" (Genesis 13:2). And, when David died here's the way the Bible described him, 1 Chronicles, chapter 29, verse 28: "*...in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour...*" (1 Chronicles 29:28).

The Bible says, "*Both riches and honour come of thee...*" (1 Chronicles 29:12). The Bible didn't condemn David for dying with riches and honor, it seems to commend him. There was a rich man who was used of our Lord. As a matter of fact, he loaned the Lord Jesus his burial place. His name was Joseph of Arimathea. He was a disciple of Jesus and the Bible says of him in Matthew 27, verse 57: "*...a rich man...*" (Matthew 27:57).

I was preaching when we were preaching through the book of Acts about a man named Barnabas. And, there is great indication that Barnabas was a man who had money. He was a wealthy man, but he used his money for the Lord. Good old Barney, son of consolation. Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus, in whose home Jesus would frequently stay, must have been people of means because they had a large home. It was a place where they could have banquets, they had feasts, and they had guests

come in, yet they were able to show their lavish love to the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, the Bible does not condemn wealth so much, but the Bible does condemn the hoarding of wealth—the loving of money—what the Bible calls that is *covetousness*. We would call it today, *ruthless greed*. Luke chapter 12, verse 15: “*And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness...*” (Luke 12:15). Now, listen folks, I have been a preacher for a long time and I have had people confess all kinds of sins to me, but I don’t ever believe I have ever had a man confess to covetousness...or a woman. It is a very deceptive sin. And, that’s the reason our Lord said, “...Take heed, and beware of covetousness...” (Luke 12:15). The Bible calls *covetousness*, “idolatry” in Colossians 3, verse 5: “...*covetousness, which is idolatry...*” (Colossians 3: 5). And, idolatry is no small sin. It could be that I am speaking to some today who little would dream that God is estimation of them is that they are idolaters. It is one thing to possess money and it is another thing for money to possess you.

I was reading about a woman named Hetty Green. Hetty Green lived a number of years ago. When she was living she was reputed to have been the richest woman in America. When she died, old Hetty had one hundred million dollars, and that’s back when a million was a million. But, you know what this woman was like? Let me tell you some things I found out about her. Rather than buying thicker clothes, she would stuff newspapers into clothes to keep from getting cold. Speaking of newspapers, when she read her morning paper she sold it again that night to somebody else. That’s right. She thought, “Well, I can get a little bit for this newspaper so she would read it and resell the newspaper.”

She had a warehouse where she collected rags. And, old Hetty, herself, worth a hundred million dollars went in that warehouse and separated rags the white ones from the colored ones because she got a penny a pound more for the white rags. She had most of her investments in New York City. And, rather than paying income tax in New York, she lived in little hovels and apartments under assumed names so they wouldn’t know she had a residence there and tax her.

Now that’s the kind of a woman she was. When Hetty Green died she was on her deathbed and they wouldn’t let the nurses come in a regular uniform because she thought it would be a waste of money to hire a real, genuine registered nurse. So, they had to take the uniforms off the women. She couldn’t die in peace if she thought they were wasting money paying that much salary for nurses to take care of this woman.

What was her problem? You see, she had more money than she could possibly spend. It wasn’t money that she needed, it was money that she loved. And, do you know that there are some folks who ought to make a generous and lavish love offering this Sunday, but you know why they won’t do it? They just hate to let it go. I mean, they love it.

*Once I knew a Baptist, he had a pious look.
He had been totally immersed except his pocketbook.
He put a dollar in the plate and would sing with might and main
“When we asunder part, it gives us inward pain.”*

Now, I know folks like that. I mean they are making money. They don't need any more money. They are really just kind of keeping score and they don't want that money in circulation.

You see, God wants money in circulation. God wants everything in circulation. There is enough to go around. There is enough to take care of everything and when God created the world, if you will think about how God made everything, He made everything with a propensity and the ability to give. The sun gives and because the sun gives we have light. The earth gives and because the earth gives we have life. The trees give and because the trees give we have life.

There is just a reciprocal service that God has put into humanity and that God has put into nature. That we are given to give, and we give to get, and we are given to give, and that's the way God intends for us to live. But, some people can't trust the Lord that much. And, they say, “Well, Lord I've just got to keep hoarding it up. I've just got to keep stashing it away. I've got to keep salting it down.” And, it's an inordinate love of money that the Bible condemns.

“A bell,” somebody said, “Is not a bell until you ring it, a song is not a song until you sing it, love is not love until you give it away, joy is not joy until you share it, and wealth is not really wealth until you spend it.” I mean, what good is paper sitting around somewhere. So, let me give you a verse, Ecclesiastes 5, verse 13: *“There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt”* (Ecclesiastes 5:13). You can keep money and it will hurt you. That's what James is saying here, look, “Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered”—watch it—“and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days” (James 5:1–3).

Now. James was writing to rich people. You say, “Well, he is not writing to me.” Let me say something folks. Almost every body in this congregation is rich compared to most of the people in this world. The clothes we wear, the houses we live in, and the beds we sleep on. Most of the people in this world, and especially those in the third world country, if they were to see your life style they would think you lived like a king. You know that? We are wealthy. Don't get the idea we are talking about millionaires. Now, when we are talking about rich people, these people that James was talking too, he said, “Listen, misery is coming to you.”

Let me tell you what happened when Jerusalem was destroyed, about ten years. One million people died, at least in the destruction of Jerusalem. And, do you know whom the looters, and the vandals, and the murderers went for first? The most wealthy people. Those were the very first people to go under. You see, these people were hoarding up all this, and James said, “Listen it would be a lot better if you had gotten it to work for the Lord Jesus Christ, rather than having it hoarded away somewhere, rather than having it salted down somewhere.”

I think what James is saying, “If you are saving for a rainy day, you are going to have one, you are going to have one.” And, he talks about not only that, but he talks about the judgment when rusty riches will testify and say, “Here was money that could have been used to win souls, here was money that could have been used to build a church, here was money that could have been used for the glory of God, but it wasn’t. It was just kept for the sheer love of money.” Now, friend I want to tell you, God looks at a man and God is interested in that man and his money first of all as to how he saves it.

II. How a Man Secures His Money

Secondly, God is interested in a man not only as to how he saves it, but as to how he secures it. Look, if you will in verse 4: “*Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth*” (James 5:4). Now James says, “Not only are some guilty by the way they save money, but some are guilty by the way they have secured their money.” That is, there are some wealthy that are suppressing the poor, and they were not paying on time, and they were keeping back wages, and somehow because of the strength and the economic power they had they were oppressing the poor.

Let me tell you something folks, God is against gain that is wrongly gotten. And, God is especially against those who oppress the poor. I’ll just give you a hint about something, which will help you all your life, God is always on the side of the poor. Now, you think about it. You read the Bible through and you will find that God is always on the side of the poor and you had better have a heart of love and compassion that wants to share with those who are in need. God is interested not only in how a man saves his money, but how a man secures his money and the curse of God is upon ill-gotten gain.

The Bible makes that very plain. In my estimation, those who make money by the liquor industry, by the gambling industry those who make money by oppressing the poor, slumlords and all the rest of them have the curse of God on them. If you are in the business, if you are in the business that somehow collects money in a wrong way, get out of that business. You don’t need that kind of money, just get out of that business. God looks at a man, and God looks at a man’s wealth, and God sees how that man

saves his money, God sees how that man secures his money.

III. How a Man Spends His Money

I'll tell you a third thing God looks at. God also looks at how a man spends his money. Look if you will now in verse 5: *"Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton"*—that is you have taken your pleasure, you have done what you wanted—*"ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter"* (James 5:5).

Now, God speaks of those who live for pleasure and pleasure alone. He speaks of those who selfishly take money that God has given them that ought to be a blessing unto other people. God has made them a steward over it and they just lavish it upon themselves.

Now, God is not against having pleasure, God wants you to have pleasure. The Bible says that, *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning"* (James 1:17). The Bible says that God *"...hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servant"* (Psalm 35:27). And, that God wants us to enjoy the things of this world. He is not against that, but while God is not against rightful and legitimate pleasure, God is dead set against wantonness, selfishness, lavishness, wastefulness, how we spend our money.

Many of us, dear friends, are spending money that could be used for soul winning. Money that could be used for missions, money that could be used for church building, it is money that is lavished upon ourselves. And, dear friend, I just want to tell you that a miserly man is a miserable man. And, people whom live for self and self alone, as though Christ never lived, as though Christ never died. These are people who one day are going to have to answer to Our Lord at the judgment.

John D. Rockefeller was dying at the age of fifty-five. He had a bleeding ulcer. About the only thing he could eat was crackers and milk. He could not sleep for one solid hour without being awakened by pain. He had millions and millions of dollars. The doctors said, "Mr. Rockefeller, you are dying and will be dead in a short time." He got to thinking—he wasn't a stupid man—he got to thinking, "It is time for me to stop concentrating on making money and start doing some of the things that I always wanted to do and ought to do."

He said, "One of the things that I am going to begin to do that I have been too busy to do before is, I am going to start giving my money." And, he started giving his money and the more he gave, the more God gave to him. And, the more he gave the happier he got. And, he started giving money, he testified later, that, "When I learned to give, it so changed my life my ulcer healed up. I began to sleep and he lived for thirty more years in wonderful health." A dying man who learned a secret that is there in the Word

of God. *“...It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35).

I wonder if we really believe that. Most of us don't believe that. Our motto is, “Get all you can. Can all you get, sit on the lid, and poison the rest.” That's the way most of us believe. But, my dear friend, the Bible says, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). And, God looks down from Heaven and God sees how a man saves his money. And, when a man begins to hoard it God says, “You are hoarding up trouble.” God sees how a man secures his money and God says, “If you did it the wrong way, you are headed for trouble.” God sees how a man spends his money and God says, “If you spend it the wrong way you are headed for trouble.”

IV. How a Man Shares His Money

I'll tell you one other thing God also says. God sees how a man shares his money. God sees how a man shares his money and God says, “You are headed for blessings.” Look therefore in verse 7: *“Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman”—and that means the farmer—“waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned”—that is don't be selfish, don't complain, don't be stingy—“behold, the judge standeth before the door”* (James 5:7–9).

What is James saying? James is saying, “One of these days, and soon, very soon we shall see the Lord. We are going to give an account of our stewardship.” One of these days Joyce and Adrian are going to have to answer for every penny that God has given us. How we saved it how we secured it, how we spent it, and how we shared it. The Lord is at the door.

Now folks, I'm telling you, just as sure as I am standing here He is going to look at me, He is going to look at you and say, “Give an account of your stewardship.” And, we are going to answer to the Lord. Now, He says, “The farmer waits for the fruit of the earth.” Now, what He is saying is that, “When you give it is like planting a seed and the crop is going to come.” And, if we, dear friend, have sown seeds of kindness and seeds of sacrifice and seeds of faith, and seeds of obedience, those seeds are going to produce the precious fruit that he is talking about. That means that one day our Lord is going to come and He is going to reward His saints.

What you give is never lost. “Though you carve your name high above the shifting sands where the steadfast rocks defy decay. All you can hold in your cold dead hand is what you have given away.” We say that, “You can't take it with you.” I guess you have heard that, “You can't take it with you.” We have all heard that.

I heard of a man who said, “Well maybe you can't.” but, he wouldn't be one to say, “You can't” until he tried. He was dying in his own home and he said, Honey, “I want you

to take all my money, put it in a big jug, and put it up in the attic, a jug with a handle on it. And, when I die, on my way up I am going to snatch at that jug and see if I can take it with me.” So, they put all his money in that big jug and set it in the attic up there. Sure enough he died and after the undertaker had done his business she decided she would go up in the attic and look. She went up in the attic and it was still there. She thought, “Well, maybe I should have put it in the basement.”

Now, folks, listen, you can't take it. I'll tell you what you can do, you can send it on ahead. You really can. There is a parable, Jesus said, “you can take your money and invest it in soul winning. And, when you get to Heaven, people there will welcome you in Heaven.” Now, folks, the only way to get your money to Heaven is to invest your money in something that is going to Heaven. And, the only thing I know that's going to Heaven is souls of men.

Conclusion

Now, I have come to the end of my message, but I want you to look at me, I want you to hear your pastor's heart. God is interested in money today. God is interested in how you save it, God is interested in how you secured it, God is interested in how you spend it, and God is interested in how you shared it. I am not ashamed to ask you, this coming Lord's Day, to ask you to make an investment in foundations for the future. I know churches, and I want to tell you that God has blessed us with a wonderful church. Now, there are lots of things that are asking for your money.

There are many causes Billy Graham, Campus Crusade, mission causes around the world. They are all good and they are all wonderful, and we ought to support causes like that, but I want to tell you something, folks. The most needful giving today, the giving that pays the best dividends, is for a Christian to support His local church. You hear me? His local church. That's God's plan. Now, our church is not some get rich quick scheme. We are not a bunch of folks that just got here yesterday. This is a church that has a past, a church that has a record, a church that has a future. We are not interested in building buildings for building's sake. These things are tools.

I believe with all of my heart that your gift will be a wise investment that will count for all eternity. I want us to build a base for missions and evangelism that will be used of God to multiply thousands and perhaps millions to Jesus and to send missionaries around this world. God has given us a rare and a precious privilege and I am going to ask you and your family to see what God wants you to do this coming Lord's Day.

I would not dare tell you what to give. I wouldn't if I could, and I couldn't if I would. But, I am going to ask you, every family, to get alone before God, and pray, and beware of rusty riches. Beware of hoarding that which God wants in circulation. Surely, God knows we need to plan for the future. But, friend, there comes a place where we are

going to have to trust God. Do what God tells us to do and do what I did last night in my study, this morning early in my study. That is, to get on our knees before God and not to say, "What part, dear Lord, do you want?" But, to give it all to Him first, and then say, "What part, dear Lord, can I keep?" I want you to do that. Then you come next Sunday, and whether it be little or it be big, if you do God's will you'll be blessed.

Woodrow Wilson was on a train. He was in Billings, Montana. He was making whistle stops. He was the President of the United States. He was on that last coach. He was on that platform there out behind. You have seen pictures of them. His wife was next to him. There were important men in government who were there. And, there was a crowd in Billings, Montana, who had come to see the President of the United States.

Two little boys kind of elbowed their way through the crowd and got right up close. One little boy had an American flag. He gave it to the President. The President took that flag and the little boy was so happy. The other little boy had nothing to give to the President that he knew of, and he wanted to give him something, and he reached down in his pocket. The little feller found a dime, took it out of his pocket, and he handed that dime to the President of the United States.

And, the President of the United States reached down and took that dime and thanked the little feller. Woodrow Wilson lived for five years after that and then he died. His wife going through his personal effects going through his billfold and she found that dime, wrapped in a piece of paper, tucked in the President's billfold. It had been with him in the most important meetings on the person, on the body, in the billfold of the President of the United States, one dime.

I've thought about that and I've thought about how God knows the fact of love that will be displayed by many of you next Sunday. And, how God will keep that as a token, because He will know why you gave it and the spirit that you gave it in.

Father, use what we bring next Sunday. And, I pray, dear God, that the offering will be one that will glorify you Lord. We will be satisfied with it if it just glorifies you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

The Bible and Bodily Healing

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: August 27, 1978

Main Scripture Text: James 5:10–15

“And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.”

JAMES 5:15

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Introduction

Take your Bibles please and turn now to James chapter 5 as we continue our study in the Book of James. Tonight, we're speaking on this subject: "The Bible and Bodily Healing"—"The Bible and Bodily Healing." I begin reading in James chapter 5, verse 10, where we left off this morning: *"Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord's that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy"* (James 5:10–11).

And then, verse 13: *“Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him”* (James 10:13–15).

Christians sometimes do get sick, and praise God—hallelujah!—there is hope in the Lord. Jesus Christ is the answer to every need that a man has. For the Bible says, *“My God shall supply all your need”*—not some of it—*“my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:19). And, that would mean needs for the spirit, needs for the soul, and, bless God, needs for the body. Now, the matter of healing is a very complicated matter, as we can see in just a moment. But, regardless of how complicated it may be, I can say at the outset, and with great joy, and with great certainty, in Jesus we have the victory. There is no need that a Christian should be born crying, live complaining, and die disappointed. Christians ought to be victorious persons. But, in spite of all of that, Christians do suffer affliction.

I want you to notice again verse 10: *“Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience”* (James 5:10). Now, there was nothing wrong (that we can tell) with the prophets that they suffered affliction, but they did. And then, the Bible says, *“Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job”* (James 5:11). And, think of the afflictions—material, physical, emotional and bodily—that ole’ Job had. The troubles of Job are even proverbial.

I. The Cause of Sickness

So, the matter is a very complicated matter. Let’s talk for just a moment about the cause of sickness—the cause of sickness. Why are people sick? Well, the causes are many, and the causes vary.

A. Some Sicknesses Are Caused by Sin

Sometimes people are sick because of their sin. As a matter of fact, I believe it would surprise us if we knew how much of our physical sickness is the result of our sin. For example, in the Book of 1 John—and you might want to turn it—1 John chapter 5 and verse 16 we see a remarkable verse. The Bible tells us there in 1 John chapter 5 and verse 16: *“If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death”* (1 John 5:16). Now, without going into all of the theological ramifications of that particular verse, just mark it down: some people die because of their sin. *“There is a sin unto death”* (1 John 5:16). And, evidently, here he’s not talking about spiritual death; he is talking about

physical, bodily death.

I'll give you another example. Turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 30. There the Apostle Paul is speaking about the way that some people mistreated the Lord's Supper, how they were acting irreverently there in the matter of taking the Lord's Supper. And there, in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, verse 30, the Apostle Paul says, "*This cause*"—and you read it in its context and the cause is very evidently because of sin. He says—"*For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep*" (1 Corinthians 11:30). And, when he said, "Sleep," he didn't mean, "Now I lay me down to sleep." He meant they were stone-cold dead in the market. Now, what he meant by that is this—that because of their sin, they were sick. Often, our sickness is the direct result of our sin. And, it doesn't even have to mean that God has to judge us. Why, God just leaves us alone sometimes, and our sin takes over.

1. Alcohol

For example, those persons who are prone to drink alcohol—they get intoxicated. Do you know what the word *intoxicated* means? Think about it. Do you know what a toxin is? A toxin is a poison—a toxin is a poison. And so, if a person is intoxicated, what has happened to him? He has poisoned himself. That's what he's done. That's the reason sometimes, when people get drunk, they regurgitate. Do you know why they do that? They have more sense in their stomach than they have in their head. Their stomach says, "This is poison. Get it out of here." A man who is drunk has poisoned himself, and it affects the body. That's the reason a man ought not to drink. It affects all of the body, gives him red eyes, gives him a dark brown breath. It gives him a yellow streak; it gives him a blue outlook and black circles under the eyes. It just simply affects all there is of him. And so, sometimes people are sick as a direct result of their sin. You know, they tell us that alcoholism is a disease. Well, isn't it strange that every other disease we're trying to eradicate the cause of it? We're trying to find the cause of cancer so we can get rid of it, and we advertise the cause and sell this particular cause. Isn't that strange? We're strange persons, aren't we?

2. Smoking

Or, I think that there are many people who are sick because they smoke cigarettes. Now, if that hurts your feelings, I am sorry, but I'm just convinced as I can be that you ought not to smoke. Dr. Evarts Graham, who is of Washington University, who is called the *father of modern chest surgery*, said this: "excessive cigarette smoking is the cause of 99% of lung cancer"—"99% of lung cancer." Dr. Linus Pauling, a Nobel Research Prize-winning chemist, said that "if you smoke a pack of cigarettes from the day that you're 20 years of age on, you will cut your life expectancy down by eight full years"—just one pack a day from 20 on. And then, he computed it out and said, "It cost you 14.4 minutes of life for every cigarette you smoke." So, you can just blow another 14.4 away

in the smoke. That's what he's saying. Now, these are not ministers of the gospel. These are research scientists and noted surgeons who are saying this kind of thing. And so, many times people are sick simply because they have become a slave to that little white slaver—the nicotine habit.

3. Poor Diet

And then, there are people who are sick, I am certain, because of their diet—because, for example, they eat everything in sight. Someone has said that “we live off of half of what we eat; the doctor lives off the other half.” And then, so many times—and Joyce will get me if I don't get this in here—we're not eating the proper foods. We're not eating the right foods. We're loading up on junk foods, and we have become a generation of junk food junkies. Somebody asked Dwight L. Moody, one time, to pray for a particular preacher who was sick. And, Moody said, “I won't do it. He does the work of two men and eats everything in sight. Why should I pray for him to be healed until he repents, until he gets right with God?”

4. Worry

And, there's another thing—another sin. Now, some of you are saying, “Well, that doesn't get me because I don't drink, and I don't smoke, and I don't chew, and I don't go with girls who do. I don't do any of that stuff.” Well, good for you. How about worry? Do you know the Bible says, “*Fret not thyself in any wise to do evil*” (Psalm 37:8)? Did you know that worry will do the same thing to you physically that sand will do to machinery? As a matter of fact, there are few forms of dissipation, drinking included, that will do as much harm to you—bodily, physical harm—as worry. And, many times our sickness is the direct result of our sin.

B. Some Sicknesses Are Caused by Satan

And then, not only can sickness be caused by sin, but sickness can be caused by Satan. Did you know that? Let me give you some verses. Turn, for example, in the Old Testament, to Job chapter 2 and verse 7—Job chapter 2 and verse 7. There you'll find that the Bible says, “*[Then] went Satan forth...and smote Job with sore boils*” (Job 2:7). Who was it that smote Job and made Job sick? The Bible says it was Satan.

Then, look in the New Testament—in Luke chapter 11 and verse 13—if you want to turn to this. I think it would be interesting. Here we find a woman who had an infirmity—a woman who was bent over—and the Bible describes her condition in these words. Luke chapter 11 and verse 13—that's not the verse I want. This was the woman who had been bound by Satan. And, Jesus, describing this woman, said, “*Satan hath bound [her]*”—“*Satan hath bound [her]*” (Luke 13:16).

And then, in Acts chapter 10 and verse 38, the Bible says that Jesus “*went about...healing all [who] were oppressed of the devil*” (Acts 10:38). Now, you put those

scriptures together. Satan smote Job with boils. Here was a woman bent over, and Jesus said, “*Satan hath bound [her]*” (Luke 13:16). And then, Dr. Luke said in the Book of Acts that Jesus “*went about...healing all [who] were oppressed of the devil*” (Luke 13:16). It was satanic oppression that had made some sick. And so, some are sick because of their sin, and some are sick because of Satan.

C. Some Sicknesses Occur Because God Allows Them

But, that’s not all of the reasons for sickness. Some people are sick because God allows it and God has a special purpose. And, it is not that Satan has done it, and it is not that their own particular personal sins have done it. I want you to see in the Bible that many of God’s choicest of saints have been sick.

Look, for example, at that classic illustration of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians. Let’s turn to that for a moment. In 2 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 7, Paul says, “*And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. [And] for this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me*” (2 Corinthians 12:7–9). Many people believe that Paul’s thorn in the flesh was an eye problem, because he spoke, in the Book of Galatians chapter 4 (Galatians 4), of how the Galatians would have plucked out their eyes and given them to him. Three times the Apostle Paul said to the Lord, “Lord, please heal me.” And, three times the Lord said, “No, I’m not going to do it.” Why wasn’t Paul healed? Was it because he had weak faith? I doubt that. Was it because there was sin in his life? I doubt that. Was it because Paul was out of the will of God? Not at all. But, God had a higher plan for Paul that we’re going to get to later.

I want you to notice also, in 2 Timothy chapter 4, for a moment, and verse 20. Let’s look at that verse for a moment, and you’re going to find here that there was another saint whose name was Trophimus, who was very grievously sick, but certainly he was a saint and a child of God. Paul says, “*Erastus abode at Corinth: but Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick*” (2 Timothy 4:20). Now, here was Paul—as a man who was an apostle, he had the power to perform miracles. Paul was a healer, but do you think that Paul just simply left this man sick because he cared not to heal him, or was too lazy to heal him, or too indifferent to heal him? Not at all. Here was a man that it was not God’s will for him to be healed. And so, Paul left this man at Miletum; he left him there sick.

Look in 1 Timothy chapter 5—just turn left for a moment—and verse 23. Here Paul is talking to his young preacher boy, Timothy, and Paul says, “*Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities*” (1 Timothy 5:23).

Here was a man who had digestive problems, and Timothy was often sick. He was a man of God, a child of God, a preacher of God, a greatly used servant of the Apostle Paul, and the Apostle Paul did not have the power to miraculously heal him. All Paul could do was write a prescription for him—that is, *“Drink no longer water, but...a little wine”* (1 Timothy 5:23) and, the expositors tell us, mixed with water. The water in Israel and in the Holy Land has a very high alkaline content; and here, Paul is saying, “This would help you and help your digestion if you’d mix a little wine in with the water.” He’s not talking here about getting drunk. He’s using, here, wine as a prescription to help this man who was often sick.

And then, Elisha—let’s turn to the Old Testament. Look in 2 Kings—and this is very good. If you would turn to it, please—2 Kings chapter 13, for a moment. And, read verse 14: *“Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died”* (2 Kings 13:14). How did Elisha die? Now, Elijah was taken to Heaven in a whirlwind—a chariot of fire. But, let me tell you how Elisha, who had a double portion of the Spirit that rested upon Elijah—how did he die? He was just taken sick, and he died of a sickness. Well, was he out of communion with God when he got sick? Was there something wrong with him? Is that why he got sick? You study the Bible and you’ll find out that he was in communion with God while he was sick, and, as a matter of fact, Elisha, on his sick bed, made one of the most remarkable prophecies in all of the Bible. And, there’s nothing—there’s no inference here—that it was because of Elisha’s sin that he was sick.

5. Power Comes Through Suffering and Sickness

You see, God often has a loving purpose in sickness. And, may I give you about five of the loving purposes of God that He might have for a child of God in sickness? The first one we’ve already studied. You remember over there in 2 Corinthians chapter 12, beginning in verse 7, where Paul had a thorn in the flesh. And, three times the Apostle Paul asked God to remove the thorn from his flesh, and God said, *“[No,] my grace is sufficient for thee...my strength is made perfect in weakness”* (2 Corinthians 12:9). One reason that we are sick is that often power comes through suffering and sickness. Paul made a marvelous discovery that through his sickness he could know the power of God. And, God said to Paul, *“My strength is made perfect in weakness”* (2 Corinthians 12:9). That is, “Paul, when you become weak enough to completely depend upon Me, you’re going to find more power than you ever knew in complete health.”

Actually, Paul said more: “therefore I will gladly rejoice in my infirmities that the power of God may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:9). And, that word “rest upon” is an unusual word. It means, actually, “to spread a tabernacle over.” God has just simply put a tent—a covering of power—over the Apostle Paul. And, Paul said, “Therefore, when I’m weak, then I’m strong.” Paul, because of his physical ailment and because of his sickness, learned to depend upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul didn’t say, “What cannot

be cured must be endured.” Paul said, “What can’t be cured can be enjoyed. Hallelujah, I will glory in my infirmity!” Have you ever said that to the Lord—“glory to God for my sickness”? Now, you’re reaching a new level of faith when you come to that place.

6. Productivity Comes Through Sickness

But, not only power, but productivity, often comes through sickness. How greatly the world has been blessed and influenced by those who are sick! I think first and foremost about Fannie Crosby, Dr. Lane—blind Fannie Crosby, who was blinded as a little child (about the age of six months). And yet, she wrote literally thousands of poems, and gospel songs, and hymns for the glory of our dear Lord. You see, sometimes God uses our suffering to bless other people. Look in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 6. While we’re just turning to it, let’s do it together. Second Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 6—and I think you’ll see this thought clearly delineated there: *“And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation”*—isn’t that remarkable? Paul says, “My affliction is your consolation. My suffering is your salvation”—*“And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation”* (2 Corinthians 1:6). Paul says, “Sometimes God afflicts me on your behalf, and sometimes God comforts me on your behalf.”

Do you remember Paul was told how many things he must suffer for the Lord’s sake? And so, productivity sometimes comes through sickness. You see, Jesus said, “Every vine in me that bringeth forth fruit, he purgeth it” (John 15:2). Do you know what—how do you purge a mind? *It means he prunes it, and here comes the gardener with those pruning shears. And, that finds an—“ouch, don’t do that; that hurts.” And, the gardener says, “I know it hurts, but it will make you fruitful—it will make you fruitful.” A man was visiting an apple orchard, and he saw a tree that was just so laden down with apples. The limb was so heavy that it had to be propped up. He asked the caretaker of the orchard about this, and he said, “You’d be surprised. This, at one time, was my least productive tree.” And, he said, “I had to take drastic measures.” And, he said, “I took an ax, and I split the trunk of this tree; and after the tree was wounded, it produced fruit like it had never produced before.” And, I think that we often have that parallel in human nature. And then, this is what the man said: “I have learned”—and I’m going to quote him now, the caretaker of the orchard—“I have learned that when a tree has nothing but branches and leaves, nothing but beautiful foliage and lumber and no fruit, that if it is hurt and wounded, it will bear fruit.” Have you got nothing but leaves? Huh? Then, look out.*

7. Purity Comes Through Sickness

Okay, sometimes not only do we see power, therefore, from suffering, but sometimes we see productivity. And then, sometimes purity may come through suffering and

sickness, and we often see this in the Bible. Look in 1 Peter chapter 5 and verse 10—1 Peter chapter 5 and verse 10: *“But the God of all grace, who hath called us into his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, and settle you”* (1 Peter 5:10). Have you ever thought that perhaps your suffering is for your perfection? For your establishment? For your strengthening? For your settling? That’s what Peter said. Ole’ Job that we just read about in the Book of James—Job said in Job chapter 23 and verse 10: *“when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold”* (Job 23:10). That is, “This suffering in me is going to burn out the dross; it’s going to burn out the impurity.” In Psalm 119, verse 67, the psalmist said, *“Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word”* (Psalm 119:67). And so, purity may come through sickness.

8. Praise Comes Through Sickness

And then, often, not only does power come, and productivity and purity, but often praise comes through suffering and sickness. Look, if you will please, in 1 Corinthians again—chapter 1. And, the Apostle Paul is talking about those who are sickly, who are called into the service of God. And, he says here in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and beginning in verse 27: *“But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise”*—and now, notice this next word—*“and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty”* (1 Corinthians 1:27). And, this word *weak* means “sickly.” That’s literally what it means. The Greek word means “sickly, debilitated, without any strength.” God has chosen sickly people. Why did He do that? Well, look in verse 29: *“That no flesh should glory in his presence”* (1 Corinthians 1:29). And then, look, if you will please, as we continue to read in verse 31: *“That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 1:31). You see, praise often comes when we’re sick. God often gets the glory through our sickness.

John 11 and verse 4: at the grave of Lazarus, Jesus said, *“This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby”* (John 11:4). Why, even your death can bring glory to God. You say, “I don’t know about my sickness.” Well, let’s try your death for a moment. In John 21, verse 19: *“This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God”* (John 21:19). Even in our death, as well as in our sickness, we may glorify God. You see, how does my sickness and sometimes my death, or your death, or your sickness glorify God? Well, it shuts the devil’s mouth.

Remember what James said? He said, “Take Job for an example.” What was the devil’s charge against Job? The devil’s charge against Job was this—that Job didn’t really love God, that the only reason that Job served God was that God had bribed him, God had bought him off, God had built a hedge around Job. And, he was saying, “God, You’re too good to Job.” Now, that dirty old devil—he was saying to Eve in the Garden of Eden, “God’s not good enough for you. Look what God’s keeping from you.” You

can't trust the devil. Have you learned that? Oh, that dirty, deceptive, diabolical, devil. And so, he says, "God, You're being too good to Job. You bought him off. You bribed him." And, God says, "You don't know My servant Job. He doesn't serve Me because of what I give him, because of what I do for him. He just loves Me. And, to prove it, Satan, you can take anything from him but his life." And, you know that Job continued to serve the Lord, and Job made that classic statement: *"Though he slay me, yet will I [serve] him"* (Job 13:15). Isn't that great?

You know, so many people have an "if faith": "Lord, if You do this, I'll do that." But, what you need is a "though faith." *"Though he slay me, yet will I [serve] him"* (Job 13:15). And, that shut the mouth of the devil. And, I'll tell you, there are servants of God today, very special people—and some of them are listening to my voice, and some of them, I believe, are in this auditorium tonight—who have been chosen of God to shut the devil's mouth. They have been chosen of God to say, "Though I do not have physical health, and though I do not have a lot of this world's goods, I love my God. And, Jesus Christ is real to me, and Jesus Christ is enough to me."

Oh, yes—sometimes sickness may glorify God and shut the devil's mouth. Andrew Murray said something that I like, and if you've not read Andrew Murray's books, you ought to read them. Andrew Murray, a dear old saint of God, wrote, "In times of trouble, the trusting child of God may say, 'First He brought me here. It is by His will that I'm in this great place. Next, He will keep me here in His love and give me grace in this trial to behave as His child. Then, He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He intends for me to learn and working in the grace life means to bestow. And last, in His good time, He can bring me out again—how and when, He knows.'" And so, he says, "Say these four things: number one, 'I'm here by God's appointment'; number two, 'I am here in God's keeping'; number three, 'I am here under His training'; and, number four, 'I am here for His time.'" Oh, how wonderful when a saint can do that! And so, James speaks, first of all, about suffering saints.

Let's go back to James, because we've been everywhere but James. And, let's just come back if we can for a moment. But, I wanted you to see something of the cause of sickness, and I wanted you to see, as James does point out, that sometimes God's choicest of saints have suffered—and not because of any particular sin of theirs, but because God has had a higher purpose.

II. The Cure of Sickness

But, not only do we want to talk about the cause of sickness. Let's talk a little bit about the cure of sickness. Let's see what the Bible tells us to do, that we might be cured. We continue to read here in James chapter 5, beginning in verse 13: *"Is [there] any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you?"*

let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he hath committed sins, they shall be forgiven him” (James 5:13–15).

A. The Problem

Now, first of all, notice the problem. Look in verse 14: *“Is any sick among you?”* (James 5:14). Now, this word *sick* is a word that means “to be without strength.” It does not refer to some little headache. It does not refer to a pain between the shoulder blades or an ingrown toenail. That’s not what he’s talking about. This word is a word that refers to genuine, real, terrible, awful, malady—to be without strength, not a mere headache or whatever. He’s talking about a grave problem.

B. The Procedure

Now, after we’ve seen the problem, let’s see the procedure. Here is one procedure—not the only procedure. This is not what a person has to do. This is what a person may do. This is one procedure. Notice the word *let*. It’s not a command but an opportunity.

9. Call the Elders of the Church

Number one: *“let him call for the elders of the church”* (James 5:14). Now, what does this word *elder* mean? It does not mean, necessarily, an older man, though that’s the etymology of the word—how it began. But, it refers to a leader in the church. The term is used in the Bible synonymously, or interchangeably, with pastor or bishop. That is, you’re to call for those in the church whom God has set aside to be the spiritual leaders in the church—not just anyone, but certain persons. No one is to go for this particular ministry without an invitation. Not some self-anointed person, some busy body, some self-appointed person with a bottle of anointing oil—that’s not what he’s talking about. But, he’s talking about someone sending for the elders of the church.

10. Let Them Anoint Him with Oil in the Name of the Lord

And then, the second thing: *“let them...[anoint] him with oil in the name of the Lord”* (James 5:14). Look at it again in verse 14: *“Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord”* (James 5:14). Let’s start with the anointing of oil before we get to the prayer. What does the anointing of oil mean? Some people believe that this means that we’re to use medicine, and they kind of shy away from the anointing of oil. So, they say this a reference to medicine and medicinal healing. For example, they say... And, incidentally, it’s often God’s will to use doctors. God does use doctors to heal. And, if we had more time, we’d talk about that. And, God often uses physical, material means to heal. There’s nothing wrong with going to a doctor, but there’s something wrong in putting

your faith in the doctor rather than putting your faith in the Lord when you go to the doctor. But here, the anointing of oil, in my estimation, does not refer to medicine.

One book I read—one commentary—said it refers to giving a person a rubdown with oil. Now, I don't believe that's what it refers to. Friend, I don't believe that the Lord wants the elders of the church going around rubbing people down with oil. I just don't believe that's what it refers to at all. But, it does refer to a special anointing. In the Bible, oil was used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit—and setting someone aside, sanctifying that person or thing for the cause of Christ. Let me just give you an example of what I'm talking about—one among many. Turn, in the Old Testament, to the Book of Leviticus, chapter 8 for a moment—all right?—and verse 10: *“And Moses took the anointing oil, and anointed the tabernacle and all that was therein, and sanctified them”* (Leviticus 8:10). You see, when you took oil and anointed something, you sanctified it. What does the word *sanctified* mean? It means “to set apart.” *“And he sprinkled thereof upon the altar seven times, and anointed the altar and all his vessels, both the laver and his foot, to sanctify them. And he poured of the anointing oil upon Aaron's head, and anointed him, to sanctify him”* (Leviticus 8:11–12).

And so, what does the anointing of oil stand for? It is a symbolic act—very similar to the taking of the Lord's Supper, or ordination, the laying on of hands, or baptism. It symbolizes something beautiful—oil being a type of the Holy Spirit in the Bible. And, the anointing of oil symbolizes the sanctifying or the setting apart of that person to serve God. And so, when a person who is sick calls for the elders of the church, those leaders may come. They may anoint that person with oil in the name of the Lord, saying, “This person is set aside for the service and the cause of Christ.”

Now, why should the Lord heal anybody who is not thus sanctified? What I'm trying to say is, why should God give you more strength to serve the devil? And, this is symbolic of the fact that this person is yielding that body completely, totally, 100% to the Holy Spirit.

C. The Prayer

Now, not only is there the calling of the elder and the anointing with oil—next there is the prayer: the problem, the procedure, and then the prayer. I want you to look at it very carefully because so many people here misunderstand: *“Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church”—the sick person—“and let them”—the elders—“pray over him”* (James 5:14). Just underscore that word “over him”—“over him.” Not to pray for him, to begin with, but to pray over him. These elders are to pray, to find, and do the will of God.

Now, let me tell you this about faith, and let me tell you this about answered prayer. *The prayer that gets to Heaven is the prayer that starts in Heaven.* We don't just

saunter forth to pray any prayer that comes into our mind. We need to find the will of God. *“This is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us”* (1 John 5:14). And so, we pray over the sick person to determine the will of God. And then, the Bible says, after we prayed over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord...and then he says, *“And the prayer of faith shall save the sick”* (James 5:15).

Now, if it is God’s will to heal a sick person, then the Bible says that God will give us the faith—God will give us the faith. And, it is the prayer of faith that saves the sick. Now, watch this, because there are people who get you in one of these highly hypnotic, emotional, so-called “healing” services, and I believe the hottest part of Hell is reserved for these charlatans, and these fakers, and these fraudulent people, who are going up and down the country bilking people out of thousands of dollars, pretending that the power of God is upon them and saying that they’re healing them when it’s nothing but a sham and a pretense. And, it’s an abomination to Almighty God.

Having said that, there is the power of God to heal, and I want you to know that. And, I believe in supernatural, miraculous healing, and I believe that God has healed me that way. And, I believe in healing, but everything that God has, the devil has a counterfeit. And, here these healers, who often go around, will take some poor person who comes through in a wheel chair with crutches or whatever, and they will lay hands on him and say some hocus pocus over him. And, nothing happens, and they’ll say, “Well brothers, it’s God’s will to heal everybody, but you didn’t have enough faith.” Can you imagine what that would do to a person who didn’t understand the Bible? Can you imagine how that would destroy his spiritual psyche? I don’t think there’s anything more abominable than that. You study this passage of scripture, mister, and you’ll find out that it’s not the sick man’s faith that’s talked about here—it’s the prayer’s faith; it’s the person who is praying over him. And, that healer better say, “Mister, I didn’t have enough faith”—not, “You didn’t have enough faith.”

The Bible says they pray over him. And, it is God who gives them the faith, and it is *“the prayer of faith [that will] save the sick”* (James 5:15). And, when a person has anointed a person, and sanctifies the person, and sets that person apart for the service of God, has prayed over them, and then God the Holy Spirit gives that person faith, he can pray in faith and they will be healed. And, I know it because I’ve seen it happen. And, I’ve seen my God heal instantaneously and miraculously, I believe, an answer to prayer, when He gives the faith. I don’t pretend to be a faith healer. That’s not my gift. That’s not my calling. But, I do pray for the sick. And, I’ve seen God heal them. And, I thank God for them, and I give Him all of the glory.

Conclusion

Well, my time is gone, and I have much more to say. But, believe it or not, I'm going to quit. Let's pray.

Do It Now

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: January 1, 1984

Main Scripture Text: James 4:13–14

“Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away”

JAMES 4:14

Outline

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Conclusion

Introduction

Do it now. Do it now. Now look, if you will, in James chapter 4 and verse 13: *“Go to now, ye that say to day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? Is it even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin”* (James 4:13–17).

Now what James gives us here is the story of a first-century wheeler-dealer. He was a boastful businessman. He had come, perhaps, to the end of one year and he was making plans for the next year. As a matter of fact, he had the next year all planned out, but his plans didn't pan out. And it wasn't God's will for him to do what he thought he would do, and he became a colossal failure. I believe he has plenty of brothers here in the twentieth century.

I. An Attitude We Should Never Take

And as we look in this passage of Scripture, first of all, I want you to see an attitude that

we should never, never take. It's found in verse 13: *"Go to now, ye that say to day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain."* What is the attitude that you should never take? It is this: that you're going to be alive a year from now. You may not be alive in '85.

Doubtless there are those in this auditorium who will not be here a year from now. And I'm not just talking about those who are old. I'm talking about some of you young people that are sitting here. I'm talking about those of you who think that you're in bad health. I'm talking to many who think that they are in good health. You will not be here. You will not be upon this earth when we assemble again in 1985. I may not be here. Mike may not be here. Tom may not be here. We don't know. The Bible says our life is *"a vapour, that appeareth for a little [while], and then vanisheth away."* Look again in verse 14: *"Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little [while], and then vanisheth away."*

Now I want you to see this man's attitude. Here was an attitude of thoughtless self-sufficiency. He planned a period of time. He has his calendar out. He assumes he has another year. He says, "I'm going to thus-and-such a city and I'll continue there a year"—no thought that he might die in that year.

But not only did he plan the period; he planned the place. He says, "I'm going into such a city"—that is, he had a city in mind; he knew exactly where he was going. Not only did he have his calendar in front of him; he had his map in front of him. He had pinpointed just the place that he was going to. Now he's not prayed for direction. He doesn't mention God in any of this. He says, "This is what I will do."

But not only did he plan the period, a year; not only did he plan the place; he also planned the procedure. He knew exactly what he was going to do. He was going to buy and he was going to sell. He was going to be a merchandiser. I suppose he had gotten a degree in marketing from the University of Jerusalem. He knew exactly how to do it. He knew how to buy and he knew how to sell. I mean, this man's mind is really working. He says, "I know how long I'm going to do it. I know where I'm going to do it. I know what I'm going to do. And I know why I'm going to do it," because he also had planned the profits. He said he was going to buy and he was going to sell and he was going to get gain. This was his forecast for the coming year. His motive in everything that he was doing here is in earthly gain; not heavenly treasure, but earthly gain.

Now I want to say that the Bible does not condemn planning. As a matter of fact, the Bible condones planning. The Bible does not condemn business. As a matter of fact, the Bible condones business. The Bible does not condemn hard work. The Bible condones hard work. The Bible does not condemn buying and selling. The Bible teaches us to buy and sell. What was wrong with this man is that he had an attitude that left God out of it. I've told you before, and I want to tell you again, that *the* biggest fool *is*

not the man who says there is no God; the biggest fool is the man who says there is a God and then does not live like it.

Now I want to ask you, have you taken God into your plans in 1985? Now most of us in 1984, most of us don't fight God. Most of us ignore God, just omit God, just plan as if God did not exist, or if He does exist that His existence has no consequence on the way that we live.

Years and years ago, I read these lines of verse that touched my heart:

*When Jesus came to Golgotha,
they hanged Him on a tree,
They drove great nails through hands and feet,
and made a Calvary;
They crowned Him with a crown of thorns,
red were His wounds and deep,
For those were crude and cruel days,
and human flesh was cheap.*

*When Jesus came to Birmingham,
they simply passed Him by.
They would not hurt a hair of Him,
they only let Him die;
For men had grown more tender,
and they would not give Him pain.
They only just passed down the street,
and left Him in the rain. (G. A. Studdert-Kennedy)*

What was wrong with this boastful businessman, this first-century wheeler-dealer, is that he omitted God, he neglected God, he left Jesus out of his plans.

II. An Assumption We Should Not Make

Now that's the attitude we should never take, one of independence from God. The assumption that we should never make is that we have a right to another day. Now I know in my own heart and in my own life I'm planning what I'm going to be doing right on up till I'm 75 and 85 and 90, and I suppose you are too. But I have no right to assume that I'm going to be here next year. I have no right to assume that God is going to continue to give me life another year. I hope He would, I honestly expect Him to, but I have no right to assume that He will.

Look again: *“Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow”*—verse 14. *“For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”* On these frosty mornings go out and breathe and see that vapor that comes out of your mouth. You see that little vapor of breath. It’s there for a moment and then it vanishes away. What is James telling you? James is telling us that life is so brief, life is so fragile, and that death is only a heartbeat away. We have people often who have come away from accidents saying, “Oh, I’ve never been closer to death than I was at that time.” But friend, you’re closer to death now than you’ve ever been, because you didn’t die at that time. You are closer to your death tonight than you ever have been.

Five thousand Americans will die tomorrow. Five thousand Americans die every day. Some die of disease. Some die of disaster. Some die by design—they take their own life. Some die by I guess what we could call decay or old age; they just die of old age. I suppose that’s the best way to die. But more people die, dear friend, with their street clothes on than die with their pajamas on. More people die suddenly and unexpectedly than die quietly and expectedly. We all think we know how we are going to die. But many of us are not going to die the way we think we’re going to die.

I have a very good, dear friend, one of the finest soul-winning young businessmen that I have known. He turned to a friend sitting at a banquet, a Christian banquet, spoke the man’s name, and died just like that; fell over, a heart attack. He’d been to the doctor, had a good check up. The doctor had told him, “Your heart is fine.” He turned to my friend, Leroy Edger, spoke to the man, and said, “Leroy,” and that was the last word he said. He died.

I had a young lady who stood on the door of my church down in Florida, took me by the hand, and said, “Pastor, that was a good sermon. See you tonight, Pastor.” But Dottie went over the causeway, going over the Banana River to Cocoa Beach; another car came over the causeway on the wrong side of the road, hit her head on, and Dottie didn’t come back to church that night. She was absolutely certain that she would.

In an area where I pastored in Mississippi five people on their way home from church were killed in an instant in an automobile wreck.

We never know the time of death, and we who are preachers are guilty of standing up and telling other people that they are going to die. I’ve told you before of my friend Bob McNamee; he was a preacher boy, and he rode back and forth to seminary from the Gulf Coast of Mississippi to New Orleans. Every day we rode back and forth in Bob’s old Plymouth automobile. And one day Bob said to me, “Adrian, there’s an old man in your church field whose name is Mr. Boucher. Mr. Boucher has had several serious heart attacks. He’s a very old man. Mr. Boucher is going to die in a few days. Adrian, would you please go by and speak to Mr. Boucher about his soul?” He was an old French Catholic that lived there on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi.

I said, “Yes, I will, Bob,” and I went by and knocked on the door. I said, “Mr. Boucher, my name is Adrian Rogers. I’ve come to talk to you about Jesus Christ. May I come in?” Now that’s just kind of a head-on approach, but that’s what I said. He said, “Yes, young man, come in.” And I said, “I want to tell you how you can know that your sins are forgiven, how you can know that Christ is in your heart, how you can know that you are going to heaven when you die.” He said, “Well, I’d like to hear that.” And I took the Bible and I explained it to him. And I said, “Mr. Boucher, if you’ll receive Christ by faith, He’ll save you. Would you like to be saved?” He said, “Yes, I would.” And it was like picking a ripe apple from a tree. He just fell off in my hand, as it were, as he prayed, and with tears asked Jesus to come into his heart. I had the joy of baptizing that old man in the Lord.

“Well,” you say, “that’s a wonderful story. But why did you tell it?” Well, remember the young preacher boy who told me, “Adrian, Mr. Boucher has a few days to live”? A few days after he told me that, he went and had lunch with his wife. And after lunch, he stood up and started to walk across the living room floor, gave a gasp, and fell dead—no warning thought of sickness, nothing whatever; tall, young, handsome; a sun-crowned, soul-winning young preacher. Mr. Boucher lived for years. Now Bob had said to me, “Adrian, that old man has a few days to live,” but it was Bob that had a few days to live. Bob had a few days to live.

Roland Maddox, I don’t know how long you are going to live. You don’t know how long you are going to live. Bob McVay, you don’t know how long you are going to live. I don’t know how long I’m going to live. We are always thinking when a man is preaching a message like this, “That’s right, preacher; tell them.” “Tell them.” “Tell them.” The football coach here at Memphis State University was already planning the next year of football, already doing his enlistment and so forth, and he had no way of knowing that that airplane that he got in would be the last airplane ride that he would ever take.

Friend, there is an assumption that we should never make, and that is that we are going to continue to live. I preached a funeral, and I stood there at the funeral, and the undertaker was standing there, and another man who is a farmer that I know. And they were both standing there talking about the uncertainty of death, because it was a funeral for a young man. We talked about that and how none of us knew when we were going to die. And I can remember Joe Yates and Mr. Priest as they stood there and talked about the strangeness of death. And they philosophized. In a few months, both of those men were dead. I remember them talking about how other people don’t know when they are going to die.

I’m telling you, friend, the Bible teaches that death is right around the corner. First Chronicles chapter 29 and verse 15: “*Our days on the earth are as a shadow*” (1 Chronicles 29:15). Job chapter 7 and verse 6: “*My days are swifter than a weaver’s*

shuttle” (Job 7:6). Psalm 39, verse 5: “Behold thou hast made my days a few handbreaths” (Psalm 39:5). Psalm 102, verse 3: “My days pass away like smoke” (Psalm 102:3). Psalm 102, verse 11: “My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass” (Psalm 102:11)—like grass.

Now dear friend, there’s an attitude that we should never take, and that is that we can live our lives without God. And there is an assumption that we should never make, and that is that we have tomorrow. Now the reason that I entitled this little message “Do It Now” is this: that whatever you intend to do for Christ and for the kingdom, you’d better get at it. I mean you’d better make 1984 your year when you will say, “Dear Lord, if you will just let me live this year, Lord, I’m going to do things for you—for you, and in your name, and by your power.”

A. **The Matter of Soul Winning**

And I believe number one ought to be soul winning. You ought to say, “Dear Lord, I’m going to be a soul winner, and I’m not going to put it off.”

George W. Truett was the great pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas before Dr. W. A. Criswell came to be the pastor. When George Truett was a young man, he knew and loved the Lord Jesus. They were having a revival meeting in that town, and George Truett was burdened for a young man that he played with and knew. The young man’s name was George also. And George Truett went by to see this young man and asked him to come to the revival meeting. But he said, “Well, I can’t come tonight. I’ve got something else to do.” And George Truett said, “Well, would you like to give your heart to Christ? Would you like to be saved?” He said, “Well, yes, but not now.”

Later, George Truett said that he left the young man, and with a promise that he would come to the revival meeting tomorrow night. And when he went back to the revival meeting tomorrow, the young man was not at the door, didn’t come to the door when George Truett knocked. His mother came to the door and said, “I’m sorry, he can’t go tonight. He’s not feeling well. Perhaps he’ll be better the next night and will go.” George Truett came back the next night, and his mother said, “Oh, he’s worse. He won’t be going anywhere this week.” George Truett came back the next night, and the doctors were there, and the friends were there, and they said to George Truett, “If you want to see this young man alive, you’d better come in.”

George Truett said, as he went into that room, he saw his friend who had suddenly been taken ill and had gone down so rapidly, and the disease had progressed at such a tremendous rate that everybody was startled and amazed at what had happened to this young man. George Truett asked if he could have a few moments alone with him, and he got up close to him and spoke to his friend, his young friend. But his young friend didn’t seem to be able to hear what George was saying. George Truett tried to carry on

a conversation, but his friend seemed to be in a state of delirium, and his lips were moving. He was saying something. He was whispering something. George Truett said, “I got up right as close to my friend as I could, my young chum that I played with. I put my ear down to his lips to hear what he was saying, and this is what he was saying: ‘Not now, George. Later. Not now, George. Later. Not now, George. Later. Later. Later.’”

Friend, I want to tell you, for some people there will be no later. That boy died, as far as George Truett knew, without Christ, without hope, because he postponed and put away his chance to receive Christ as his personal Savior and Lord.

You say, “Brother Rogers, I just don’t believe in stories like that.” Well then, friend, you’d better go read again what James has said. “*Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth*” (Proverbs 27:1). And, “*He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed*” (Proverbs 29:1). I don’t know when Jesus is coming, but I know this much: souls are going, and I know that they are slipping out through the jaws of death into a Christless eternity. And one of these days they are going to drop the clods on the casket of your friend, of your brother, of your mother, of your father, on your neighbor, or your wife or your husband. People are dying. “Our life is like a vapor that passeth away.” And you’re passing away.

I’m giving myself this coming year to soul winning. Will you? Say *amen*. I’m giving myself to soul winning, friend. I’ll tell you, one of these days the things that we think are so important are not going to be important. I don’t care how circumspectly you walk, I don’t care how eloquently you preach, I care not how faithfully you attend, I care not how liberally you give: if you are not winning souls, you’re not right with God. Now that might hurt some feelings, but you’re not, dear friend. I’m not saying you have to be successful, but friend, you ought to at least be witnessing. You ought to be trying. I mean, the burning question is not, when is the last time you won a soul to Jesus; the burning question is, when is the last time you tried. When is the last time you said, “Dear Lord, give me a passion for souls; God make me a soul winner”? I’ll tell you, they are passing away. Souls are dying. While I’m standing here they are dying and going to hell, and some of them are people that we should win.

B. The Matter of Stewardship

But I’ll tell you not only this matter of soul winning, but this matter of stewardship. I believe that every Christian ought to be a tither. Say *amen*. Every Christian ought to be a tither—at least a tenth. We haven’t arrived when we tithe; we’ve just gotten started. Tithing is not the ceiling; it’s the floor. Somebody says, “Well, tithing, that’s the Old Testament.” Friend, tithing is Bible: Old Testament and New Testament. Tithing was taught before the law, during the law, and after the law. You say, “Well, it’s Jewish.” Well, *any Christian who’d let a Jew do more under law than you’d do under grace is a*

disgrace *to grace*. I want to tell you, dear friend, that we need to get faithful in this matter of stewardship.

If God's people, the members of this church, would tithe, and had been tithing for the past five years, we'd already have enough money in the bank to buy this property and pay for it and to build those buildings. You know it is true—you know it is true. What we're trying to do now is to make up for the fact that through the years we've not been faithful in this matter of stewardship. I want you to say, by God's grace this coming year, and starting this week, that one tenth of your income as a bare minimum will be brought to God's house on God's day for God's work in God's way. And I believe you ought to bring your tithe to God's house. I believe that it ought to be given through the church where you are a member. That's my conviction, and I believe it with my heart.

C. The Matter of Prayer

Now I want to tell you something else, dear friend. I believe that those of us who intend to pray ought to say, "God, I'm going to pray. I'm going to have a quiet time. With God helping me, I'm going to be busy in this matter of prayer. I'm going to have some time alone with God everyday, so help me God. I'm going to give God that best time, that prime time, that special time."

D. The Matter of Bible Study

I'm going to say something else that you need to do. You need to say, "Lord, I'm going to become a student of your Word." Did you know that there are some people who have been Christians for years who have never even read the Bible through? Many of them cannot even quote a few verses of the Scripture. Many of them do not even know the plan of salvation by heart. Many of them could not quote by memory a chapter from the Bible. Many of them do not know the great Bible history. You say, "Well, Brother Rogers, it's not my fault. I just have a poor memory." I don't buy that. If you got a thousand dollars for every verse you memorized, you'd turn into a memory machine. It's just a matter of motivation; it's a matter of wanting to. It's a matter of really seeing the importance of knowing the Word of God.

And I want to tell you, dear friend, that there are some things that you'd better do. If you are going to be a soul winner, you'd better get at it. If you are going to be a steward, you'd better get at it. If you're going to be an intercessor and one who supplicates, you'd better get at it. If you're going to be a student of God's Word, you had better get at it.

III. An Activity We Should Not Forsake

There's one last thing I'm going to say, and I'm going to finish. Not only is there an attitude we should never take, and an assumption we should never make; but friend, there's an activity that we must not forsake. Look, if you will, in verse 17: "*Therefore to*

him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” You were created to know God, to love God, to serve God. And no matter what else you do, if you do not love and serve God, if God is left out the sum total of your life, it is going to be sin. I want to tell you that God did not bathe this world with the blood of his dear Son for you to live for sin and self and the devil. *“To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”*

Now a man who is lost and misses heaven does not miss heaven because of what he does. He goes to hell for what he does. But he misses heaven for what he does not do—and that is that he does not receive Christ as his personal Savior. The Bible says, *“He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God”* (John 3:18). *“To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”* No matter what else you do this year, if you live without Jesus, you’re going to live a year filled with sin; I don’t care what you do. *“To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”*

Conclusion

I saw a tract one time. On one side of the tract it said, “What must I do to be lost?” and when you turn the tract over, in bold letters it said, “Nothing”—“Nothing.” What must I do to be lost? Nothing. *“To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”* What does a man have to do to die and go to hell? Nothing: he’s already lost—he’s already lost. *“He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”*

How to Pray for Friends and Influence People

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: September 3, 1978

Main Scripture Text: James 5:16–18

“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”

JAMES 5:16

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Introduction

Now, turn to James chapter 5, and we begin now where we left off last Sunday night in verse 16—James chapter 5 and verse 16: *“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit”* (James 5:16–18). I’m speaking today on this subject: “How to Pray for Friends and Influence People.” There is no way possible that I could overstate the importance of prayer, and I pray God that you will never underestimate the importance of prayer.

Andrew Murray said, “In relation to His people, God works only in answer to their prayers.” Notice the word *only*: “only in answer to their prayers.” And then, he said, “It is in prayer that we change our natural strength for the supernatural strength of God.” Dr. R. A. Torrey, the great noted Bible preacher, said, “Nothing lies beyond the reach of prayer except that that lies beyond the will of God.” Dr. A. C. Dickson, a fine expositor of the Word of God, said, “When we depend upon organization, we get what organization can do—and that is something. When we depend upon education, we get what education can be—and that is something. When we depend upon money, we get what money can do—and that is something. When we depend upon singing and preaching, we get what singing and preaching can do—and that is something.” But then, he said, “When we depend upon prayer, we get what God can do.” And oh, what this world needs is what God can do. What our city needs is what God can do. What your home needs is what God can do. What our church needs is what God can do. You don’t have a failure in your life but what somehow it’s a prayer failure. You don’t have a need in your life but what earnest persistent believing prayer could supply that need in your life. There’s not a sin in your life but what prayer—the right kind of prayer; prayer in the Savior’s name; effectual, fervent prayer—would have prevented that sin.

And so, James has several recurring things that come to us again and again through this epistle, and one of them is the power of prevailing prayer. And now, he’s talking about the prayers of intercession—not just getting the things that we need, as he talked about in chapter 4, but helping our friends to have their needs met. So, he says, “*Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed*” (James 5:16). There are four things that I want us to pitch our mental tents around this morning, as we study this passage of scripture.

I. The Confession We Must Make

Number one: The confession we must make—the confession we must make. Look in verse 16: James says, “*Confess your faults one to another*” (James 5:16). Now, I’ll tell you something that most of us are not very good at, and that is confessing our faults. Amen? Oh, it’s all right—you can say “amen.” I mean, we’re talking about you. We’re not very good about confessing our faults. Oh, we’re pretty good about criticizing our friends. Oh, and we’re very good about castigating our foes, but we’re also very good about concealing our faults, right? To err is human, and to cover it up is, too. We just want to cover up our faults. We don’t want anybody to know that we have any faults. But, let me tell you something, friend: if you will study the history of revival, you will find out that great revivals are not necessarily marked with great singing or great preaching, but they are marked with great confession of sin—not only to God, but to one another. Where God’s people are broken, God seems to move. James says, “*Confess your faults*

one to another” (James 5:16). Think of the things that take place when we confess our faults.

A. Restoration

First of all, there is restoration. James says, “*Confess your faults one to another...that [you] may be healed*” (James 5:16). And, this word *healing* here does not merely refer to the healing of the body. It’s a larger word, and it may refer to the healing of the soul or the healing of the spirit. And, whether there be physical brokenness, whether there be emotional brokenness, whether there be spiritual brokenness, restoration is needed. When we begin to confess our sins, God begins to move in and work. For the Bible says, “*A broken and a contrite [spirit]...thou wilt not despise, [O God]*” (Psalm 51:17).

B. Reconciliation

But, not only is there restoration—there’s reconciliation. Do you remember when the Lord Jesus Christ was talking about worship and the Lord Jesus Christ said, “When you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother hath aught against thee, leave your gift at the altar, and go. And first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and make your gift” (Matthew 5:23–24). Oh, when we go to our brother and say, “I have sinned against God, and I’ve sinned against you. And, I want to confess my faults to you,” oh, don’t you know, dear friend—don’t you know—that Heaven begins to rejoice? Don’t you know that the angels begin to sing because there is fellowship and there is reconciliation? There can be no reconciliation when a wrong is done until there is confession.

C. Revival

Sometimes we just want to skip over that. And so, when there is restoration and reconciliation, friend, there is revival—revival. That’s what happens when we confess our faults. You study the history of revival. Dr. Culpepper, who’s here teaching in our seminary, and Miss Bertha Smith, one of our premier missionaries to China, tell us about the great Shantung revival, and they tell us that that revival began when the missionaries begin to confess their sins one to another—where they begin to ask forgiveness and to make reconciliation. And, God began to restore, and a great mighty revival—one the mightiest revivals the world has ever known—began there—the Shantung revival, when there was the confession of faults one to another.

Up here in Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky, one day in chapel, the Spirit of God moved upon some students who began to confess their faults one to another and to pray one for another. And, there was such a spirit of brokenness and such a spirit of weeping, and God moved in like a tornado. And, there was a mighty overflowing of the Spirit of God when the saints of God began to confess their faults one to another. I tell

you, it will be a great day in the churches of America when confession replaces criticism and when compassion replaces condemnation. James says, *“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that [you] may be healed”* (James 5:16).

Now, you need to be careful because the devil will use anything to his advantage—even confession. James doesn’t say broadcast your faults, display your faults—no, he doesn’t say that. Jesus warned about casting your pearls before swine (Matthew 7:6). And, you see, the circle of confession needs to follow the circle of sin. What I mean by that is this—private sin, private confession, between you and the Lord or with a trusted prayer warrior who can pray for you if you need victory—personal sin, personal confession. If you’ve sinned against me or I’ve sinned against you, we need to go and confess one to the other, not talk about it to other people—personal sin, personal confession. Public sin, public confession—if you have publicly dishonored the Lord, you need to publicly repent and publicly get right with God, because even though you’ve changed in your heart, your brothers and your sisters may not know it. And so, there is what James is saying: *“Confess your [sins] one to another”—“your faults one to another”—“and pray one for another, that ye may be healed”* (James 5:16).

II. The Command That We Should Mind

And so, number one: There is the confession we must make—verse 16 (James 5:16). Also, in verse 16, there is the command that we should mind. What command of God should we mind that’s found in verse 16? Well, look at it: *“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another”* (James 5:16). This is a command, and we had better mind that command. God says pray. Luke 18:1: *“And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray.”* The Bible says in 1 Thessalonians, *“pray without ceasing”* (1 Thessalonians 5:17). God forbid, the Bible says, that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you. And, it’s so wonderful that God hears our prayers.

A little girl heard the choir singing that song, “God is Still on the Throne.” She didn’t understand it quite correctly and told someone they were singing, “God is Still on the Phone.” Well, He is, thank God. There’s a heavenly hotline, and thank God—God is still on the phone. He answers our prayers. And, did you know, dear friend, that prayer is the greatest Christian privilege—that you and I can talk with God? I mean, think about it—the one who scooped out the seas, and heaped up the mountains, and flung out the stars. The omnipotent God has invited us to talk with him. It’s the greatest Christian privilege; it’s the greatest Christian power. More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of. And oh, it is the greatest Christian failure. We have not because we ask not. May God forgive us.

There’s a command that we’re to mind, and it is we are to pray one for another.

Prayer, dear friend, is not just getting ready for Christian service—prayer *is* Christian service. And, you're serving God when you pray. I serve God more when I pray than when I preach. Dr. Lane serves God more when he prays than when he sings. You serve God more when you pray than when you win souls. One is not meant to be a substitute for the other. But, you listen to me—you can do more than pray after you pray, but you can do no more than pray until you pray. That is to be effective for Almighty God. This is what God is saying. Here is the command we must mind: James says, *"Pray one for another, that ye may be healed"* (James 5:16). The sick need more than our pity; they need our prayers. Those with faults need more than our condemnation; they need our intercession. *"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that [you] may be healed"* (James 5:16). The Bible says, *"Ye which are spiritual, restore such [a] one in the spirit of meekness"* (Galatians 6:1).

Have you ever noticed that sometimes when a new convert comes down the aisle and especially if he's been a notorious sinner, he gives his heart to Christ, he gets saved, everybody watches him like a hawk, and then the first thing you know, he slips, perhaps he goes back into the old world, perhaps he he's been a drunkard and he takes another drink. Perhaps he's been a fornicator, and he slips again, or perhaps he's used abusive language and he curses again. So many times the Christians say, uh huh, just as I thought, look at him, look how he failed. And rather than helping him it seems as though they put their heel on his head and push him down further into the mud. The Bible says, ye, which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted. Somebody has said the Christian army is the only army in the world that shoots it's wounded. God forgive us. We are not to criticize; we're to help, we're to lift, we're to boost. Confess your faults one to another and pray one for another that ye may be healed. This is the command that we should mind. We are to pray one for another.

III. The Conditions We Should Meet

Now, the third thing I want you to notice in this passage of scripture is the conditions we should meet—the conditions we should meet—because not all prayer is answered, not all prayer gets to God. And, James has been telling us in the Book of James about the various conditions of prayer.

For example, in the first chapter he told us to *"ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea"* (James 1:6). Again, he told us to ask for the right things, because we ask and receive not because we ask amiss. And, there various times that James has told us how to pray, but here James adds two more conditions to answered prayer—the conditions we should meet. And, the first condition is the intensity of the asking, and the second condition is the integrity of the asker.

I want you to look at it—look at it in verse 16, as he talks about the conditions we should meet. He says, “*The effectual [and] fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*”—“*the effectual fervent prayer*” (James 5:16). Now, these words—“*the effectual fervent prayer*” (James 5:16)—are a translation of one Greek word. And, we have two words in English but one word in the Greek. And, it literally means “stretched out”—“stretched out.” That’s what “effectual fervent” means—“stretched out.” The idea—get a picture of a horse who is jumping over a barricade, and that horse is just stretched out there as it leaps over. Or, get the idea of an athlete who’s running for the gold, and he burst for the tape; and he just stretches himself out for the goal. James says that’s the way we are to prayer—we are to be striving for the goal; we’re to be eager, earnest, fervent, impassioned in our prayers. God forgive our cold, lukewarm, good-evil, milquetoast, take-it-or-leave-it type of prayers. Our prayers are to be effectual; they’re to be fervent. They’re to be on fire; they’re to be stretched out. And, by stretched out I don’t mean stretched out on your bed half asleep. That’s not what James is talking about—not at all. He’s talking about prayer that is intense—intense.

I remember one time in Florida I received a telephone call from a man who was very distraught. This man was a drunkard, and he had just received a message that his wife had a malignancy. And, he was very, very distraught because he loved his wife. His mother had been praying for him to be saved, and she was one of the most saintly women that I ever knew. And, she was praying for her son, Bob. Well, Bob called me, and he said, “Preacher, would you come over? We’ve got this bad news. Come over and pray.” Well, I went over to pray, and we were in the kitchen there. Here was the old saintly mother. Here was the profligate drunkard son. And, here I was, the young preacher. And so, I said, “Well, let’s pray.” And, we got down around that kitchen table, and I started to pray. I thought I was doing a pretty good job of praying, but right in the middle of my prayer he said, “Pray, Preacher. You ain’t praying.” Well, I turned it up a little bit. I don’t know—I don’t know—that the prayer was any more effective, but I got louder and a little faster. And, after a while, he had just enough liquor in him then to loosen his tongue. And, he said, “Pray, Preacher. You ain’t praying.” Well, I just stopped altogether then, because I was somewhat frustrated.

And, I looked around, and that little mother was gone. I didn’t know where she was. So, I got up and started to walk through the house, and in another room I found her stretched out there on the floor. She had her hands out like this—her face in the rug—and I just stopped with a holy curiosity, and I listened to her prayer. I listened to her as she ascended the ladder to Heaven. I listened to her as she pushed back the gates of pearl. I listened to her as she walked down the golden street. I listened to her as she went through the Holy of Holies—the curtain into the Holy of Holies. I listened to her as she applied the blood there on the altar of God and as she pled with God, as a she got

hold of God. I listened to her as she groaned, and agonized, and prayed to God. I saw her stretched out there on the floor. Then I knew what that boy meant when he said, “Pray Preacher. You ain’t praying.” He had heard his mama pray. And, I think of that kind of prayer—stretched out prayer. There she was stretched out physically, but that’s only an illustration of what James is talking about.

Oh, sometimes, ladies and gentlemen, we give without sacrifice, we pray without fasting, we witness without tears. Is it any wonder that we sow without results? James says, *“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”* (James 5:16). How God has convicted my heart again as I’ve studied the Book of James! And, how I’ve had to bow my head, and confess my sin, and say, “O God, forgive my cold, lukewarm, indifferent prayers! O God, may I learn how to pray effectually. May I learn how to pray fervently! May I pray as James taught us to pray: *‘the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much’*” (James 5:16). Oh, what is James talking about when he talks about the conditions that we should meet? He’s talking about the intensity of the asking.

Sometimes people get in arguments about the posture that we ought to have when we pray.

*“The proper way for a man to pray,”
Said Deacon Lemuel Keyes,
“And the only proper attitude
Is down upon his knees.”*

*“No, I should say the way to pray,”
Said Reverend Doctor Wise,
“Is standing straight with outstretched arms
And rapt and upturned eyes.”*

*“Oh, no, no, no,”
Said Elder Slow,
“Such posture is to proud.
A man should pray with eyes fast closed
And head contritely bowed.”*

*“It seems to me his hands should be
Austerely clasped in front
With both thumbs pointing to the ground,”
Said Reverend Doctor Blunt.*

*“Last year I fell in Hidgekin’s well
Head first,” said Cyrus Brown.
“With both my heels a-stickin’ up
And my head al pointing down.*

*And I made a prayer right then and there—
The prayingest prayer ever said,
A-standing on my head” (author unknown).*

I think that’s what James is talking about. It’s not so much the position of your body; it’s the intensity of your desire. Half-hearted, lukewarm, indifferent prayers don’t get through.

IV. The Character We Ought to Manifest

Now, look what James says: first of all, there’s the confession we ought to make; and then, James speaks of the command that we ought to mind. And then, James speaks of the conditions that we ought to meet. And then, finally, James speaks of the character that we ought to manifest—the character that we ought to manifest. Look, if you will please, in James chapter 5 again, and I’m reading now verses 17 through 18: and James says, “[And] *Elias*”—and that literally means “Elijah”—“*was a man [of] like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit*” (James 5:17–18). And now, the Bible mentions a character, a biblical character, and James is saying that we can be like him. We can manifest the same character that Elijah had because he was a man of like passions as we are. And, we should manifest the character of Elijah. The character that we should manifest is what he’s talking about here.

Now, what is the prayer that James is referring to? Any good sermon has good illustrations in it. And, James certainly used a good one here. He’s talking about effectual, fervent prayer, and his illustration of effectual, fervent prayer is an episode that took place in the Old Testament—in 1 Kings chapter 18—so turn to it. First Kings chapter 18—and we begin reading in verse 42. And, there you will find the episode—the character that we should mimic and manifest is found right here.

Now, what has happened is this—that because of the judgment of God upon a sinful nation for three-and-one-half years there was no rain. And, this transpired because of the prayers of a man named Elijah. He had prayed, and the heavens became as brass, and the fields are withered in the...and the cattle died, and there was a curse of God upon the land. And then, there was that mountaintop revival where the fire of the Lord fell, and then it was time for it to rain again. And, the same prophet of God, who through his prayers had turned the water off, was now ready to turn it back on again. And, he’s going back to God in prayer, and that is the circumstance. Remember that old King Ahab, the wicked king, was upon the throne of Israel.

And, we begin reading here in 1 Kings chapter 18 and verse 42: “*So Ahab went up to eat and drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel” and he cast himself down*

upon the earth, and put his face between his knees, And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times. And it came to pass on the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up [and] say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down that the rain stop thee not. And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain" (1 Kings 18:42–45).

This is the episode that James has chosen to use as an illustration of the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man. Let's notice the man. We talked about the intensity of the asking; let's talk about the integrity of the asker—the integrity of the asker. And, you see, Elijah was God's man. He had integrity. He was a man who was a righteous man. Do you want your prayers answered? Then you must be a righteous man. You must be like Elijah, who was God's man. Please pay attention to me and listen to me. I can give you in a simple word why most of our prayers are not answered—sin. I'll be Reverend Doctor Blunt: sin—just plain sin. You don't need a theologian even to tell you.

James says it is *"the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man [that] availeth much"* (James 5:16). I want you to put these scriptures down in your notebook. Proverbs chapter 15, verse 29: *"The LORD is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous"* (Proverbs 15:29). Psalm 66, verse 18—listen to it: *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me"* (Psalm 66:18). Listen to Isaiah chapter 59, verses 1 and 2: *"Behold, the LORD's [arm] is not shortened, that [he] cannot save; neither [is] his ear heavy, that [he] cannot hear: But your [sins] have separated between you and your God, and your [iniquities] have hid his face from you, that he will not hear"* (Isaiah 59:1–2).

Now, Elijah was a righteous man, and that's the reason that God heard his prayer. You see, James says there are two—there are two conditions. Number one: There is the intensity of the asker. Number two—or the asking—and number two: the integrity of the asker—the man who has integrity. Say, have you been saved? Is Jesus Christ your personal Savior? There's no possible way in this dispensation that you can be righteous apart from Jesus Christ. He is *"made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification"* (1 Corinthians 1:30). Have you received him? But, not only is James talking about positional righteousness—he's talking about practical righteousness. Are you living day by day obeying the commandments as well as quoting the promises? Are you? Are you righteous? Are you living a pure life, a clean life? *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me"* (Job 36:21). How foolish we are not to relinquish our sins!

Do you know how they catch monkeys in the South Sea Islands? They take a coconut and tie that coconut to a tree, and they make a hole in the top of the coconut—

just about so big around—and put a handful of rice in that coconut. Monkeys are very curious; they’ll come and look into the coconut, see the handful of rice, reach their paw in there, take a handful of rice, and then their fist is bigger than the hole and they can’t withdraw it. Now, when the captor comes, that monkey will scream, and plead, and be frightened to death, but he’ll never let go of that rice. And, that’s the way they capture the poor monkey. You say, “Stupid monkey”—stupid person who will not relinquish that sin, that he might have the blessings of God upon his life; foolish person who is taken captive of Satan who will not have power with God because of some handful of rice that he holds to—some sin, some habit, some grudge. *“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”* (James 5:16).

A. The Person of the Prayer

Now, look at this prayer. You’re still in 1 Kings chapter 18. Look at this prayer of Elijah, and I want us to notice several things about it and then we’ll be finished. First of all, I want you to notice the person of the prayer. It was Elijah in verse 42—1 Kings chapter 18 and verse 42 (1 Kings 18:42). Elijah, Elijah—he was a man of like passions as we are. You know, sometimes, folks, listen—we get the idea that those people who lived way back yonder...they were different than we were. We think that they lived in a different world, that they breathed different air, but they were made of the same stuff we are. And, what James is saying is that the same God who answers Elijah’s prayer will answer your prayer. Do you believe that? You know, we say, “Where is the Lord God of Elijah?” The question is, “Where are the Elijahs of God? Where are the people who are just willing to believe God like Elijah did?” Elijah wasn’t perfect. He was a prophet, but he wasn’t perfect. He made his mistakes. You read the next chapter here, and you’ll find this man, who stood before 450 prophets of Baal, is running from one demon-inspired woman. You find him in a little while with his head between his knees moaning, and groaning, and wishing he could die. He knew what it was to get depressed. He knew what it was to fail. Do you know somehow his failures can be an inspiration to us? Do you know, I mean, that he was an ordinary man? Look folks, the same God that answered Elijah’s prayers will answer yours. The person of the prayer—Elijah.

B. The Place of the Prayer

The second thing I want you to notice—look—the place of the prayer. Look in verse 42 again—1 Kings 18, verse 42: *“And Elijah went up to the top of [Mount] Carmel”* (1 Kings 18:42). What does that mean? It means that he got off by himself. Jesus said, “When you pray, go into your closet and pray and your Father which seeth thee in secret shall reward thee openly” (Matthew 6:6). He sought out a place where he could be alone with God. Old Ahab went off to eat and drink—that drunken sot. But Elijah, the man of God, went to a secret place and got down on his knees. And, let me tell you something,

mister: the secret of your success in your Sunday School class is not how well you teach in public but how well you prevail in private. The secret of Dr. Tommy Lane's music is not his musical ear, and his great ability, and his rhythm, and his commanding performance here on this platform, but the difference as to whether the choir music and his ministry will bless your heart or not is in direct proportion to the time he spends in prayer. The choir may entertain, the choir may amaze, it may amuse, but it will never bless until that music is soaked in prayer. I want to tell you, dear friend, that the effect of my preaching is not measured by how my sermons are outlined or illustrated, but is there the power of Almighty God upon my life because I've been alone with God in prayer? Here was Elijah who knew what it was to go alone with God in prayer. Do you know what it is? You see, there was the person of the prayer—man of like passions. There was the place of the prayer—he went up to Mount Carmel.

C. The Posture of the Prayer

I want you to notice the posture of the prayer. Look in verse 42 again—look at it: the Bible says here, *“he cast himself down upon the earth and put his face between his knees”* (1 Kings 18:42). Here is a man bent over. Here is a man who is broken. Here is a man stretched out before God with his face between his knees. Do you know why Elijah was such a bold man when he stood before Ahab, that wicked king who had such power—and here's a little preacher who stands right in the face of a wicked? What gave Elijah that boldness? I'll tell you what—no man needs fear any earthly king when he's just had an audience with the King of kings. Amen? Listen, the man who can kneel before God can stand before any other man if he can kneel before God. Oh, here was a humble man. The Bible says, *“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he [will] lift you up”* (James 4:10).

D. The Passion of the Prayer

I want you to notice also the passion of the prayer. Look at it in verse 42: and the Bible says, *“And he cast himself down upon the earth”* (1 Kings 18:42). He's not spreading out a little kneeling rail there. He's not putting his handkerchief out so his knees want get dirty. Here's a man who just, in great intensity, he comes to God, he throws himself into it as he prays. He prays a passionate prayer and, therefore, a powerful prayer. Jesus said, “Prayer is seeking. Prayer is asking. Prayer is knocking.” And, men ought to pray with fervency. *“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”* (James 5:16).

I read in the Book of Hebrews how my Savior prayed and I read in Hebrews chapter 5, verse 7 these words: *“[and] he offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears”* (Hebrews 5:7). How that rebukes me! *“With strong crying and tears”* (Hebrews 5:7). When's the last time you shed a tear over some soul that was

mortgaged to the devil? When's the last time that you, as Jacob, said, "O God, I won't let You go, except You bless me"? When's the last time you labored with God in prayer, as the Bible says? Prayer is hard work, friends—intercession and prayer. I'd rather preach than pray for the energy that it takes. I'd rather study than pray for the energy it takes. It takes work to pray. And, here's a man who was praying passionately. He cast himself upon the ground—the passion of the prayer.

E. The Persistence of the Prayer

Then, I want you to notice the persistence of the prayer. Look, if you will, in verse 43: *"And [he] said to his servant, Go up now, [and] look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and he said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times"* (1 Kings 18:43). Now, notice—Elijah is praying for rain. He prays for rain. He says to his servant, "Go see if you see any rain." He says, "There's nothing—clear blue sky." Elijah prays again. He says, "Go look," and there's nothing. And, he prays again, and he says, "Go look," and there's nothing. And, he prays again, and he says, "Go look," and there's nothing. And, again, and again, and again, and again—seven times—until the man says, "I see a cloud about the size of a man's hand." It's like ole' Elijah himself had pressed his hand against Heaven and said, "O God, I want an answer," and there's sort of a holy audacity. There's the persistence of the prayer where Jesus said, *"Knock, and it shall be opened [to] you"* (Matthew 7:7). It literally says, "Keep on knocking." Where he says, "Seek," it says, "Keep on seeking." Where it says, "Ask," the Greek language says, "Keep on asking."

The Bible says in Luke 18:1 *"that men ought always to pray, and not to faint."* The Bible says, *"Be not weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if [you] faint not"* (Galatians 6:9). The Bible says that we are to *"continue in prayer"* (Colossians 4:2) in Colossians chapter 4, verse 2. And, the Bible says in Isaiah chapter 30 and verse 18: *"therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you"* (Isaiah 30:18). Sometimes God doesn't answer right away. Sometimes, because God has a gracious purpose, God delays. But, learn this about prayer. Are you willing to learn a lesson this morning about prayer? *God's delays are not God's denials.* Here was a man of God who knew that. And so, he passionately and persistently prayed—seven times the same prayer—but he found the answer, and I thank God for that. Oh, the persistence of the prayer! May God enable me—may God enable you—to find a purpose, a holy purpose, and continue with God in prayer until that purpose is answered!

George Mueller was a great man of faith, but he prayed for one man of his life, and that man was not saved until the day of Mueller's funeral. But, Mueller never stopped asking, never stopped asking, never stopped asking then. There's the power of his prayer. Look at—look at it, if you will please, in verse 45. Look at it: *"And it came to pass*

in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain” (1 Kings 18:45). That’s what James meant when he says, “Elijah was a man [of] like passions as we are, and he prayed” (James 5:17), and the heavens sent rain. That’s the illustration. There was a great rain.

Oh, the power of the prayer! Nothing lies beyond the reach of prayer except that that lies outside the will of God.

[Oh,] there shall be showers of blessing;

...

Showers of blessing we need:

Mercy drops round us are falling,

But for the showers we plead (Daniel W. Whittle).

Conclusion

I tell you what I want for Bellevue Church: I want something for this church that cannot be explained except that God has done it. That’s what I want. I want something that cannot be written off by someone’s personality, someone’s propaganda, someone’s program. I want something that will have the unmistakable stamp of God upon it, and this is none other than the work of God. I don’t mean that it has to be sensational or noisy. A sunrise doesn’t make much noise, but it’s got the stamp of God on it. I want the stamp of God on it. And, that comes through prayer. I want our fellowship—not frozen together by formalism, not wired together by organization, not rusted together by tradition. I want us melted together by prayer—where we pray one to another. That’s what I want. I want your home blessed by prayer. I want your estranged children brought back by prayer. I want your weak will made strong by prayer. I want your needs met by prayer. I want you to have victory over the world, the flesh, the devil by prayer. And, James says that we have not because we ask not (James 4:3). Your friends need your prayers. Pray one for another. I need your prayers. You need my prayers. Oh, God grant that we might pray with fervency, and frequency, and fruitfulness! *“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16).*

Bow your heads in prayer for a moment.

The Righteous Man and His Prayer Life

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: April 3, 1991

Main Scripture Text: James 5:16–18

Sponsored by: Sponsor

“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”

JAMES 5:16

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Introduction

Turn with me to the book of James chapter 5, and in just a few moments, we're going to begin reading in verse 16. I want to talk tonight on this subject: "The Righteous Man and His Prayer Life."

You are no greater than your prayer life, no greater than your prayer life. There is no way possible for me to overstate the importance of prayer. I read sometimes a great Dutch theologian of yesterday, Andrew Murray. Andrew Murray made a remarkable statement concerning prayer. He said this: "In relation to the people of God, God works only in answer to their prayer." Have you thought about that? Only in answer to their prayer! The great R. A. Torrey said, "Nothing lies beyond the reach of prayer except that which lies outside the will of God." And A. C. Dixon of another generation said, "When we depend upon organization, we get what organization can do." I'm glad that Bellevue's organized. It's well organized. And I'm glad for what organization can do.

And he said, “We get what organization can do, and that is something.” He went on to say, “When we depend upon education, we get what education can do, and that is something.” He said, “When we depend upon money, we get what money can do, and that is something. When we get, depend upon singing and preaching, we get what singing and preaching can do, and that is something.” But he said, “When we depend upon prayer, we get what God can do.” And, dear friend, what our churches and what our homes and what our schools and what we as individuals need, what Bellevue needs, and Victoria Baptist Church needs is what God can do. I mean, we need something that cannot be explained by education, organization, preaching, praying, and the rest—preaching, singing, and the rest of it; something that has the unmistakable authenticity, the stamp of authenticity, the stamp of Almighty God.

Now James here is telling us about prayer and the man of God. Notice here: “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias (that means Elijah) was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth for the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”

Now let’s see what God intends for our prayer lives to be like. Let’s see what God wants to do in Bellevue and Victoria.

I. The Confession That Precedes It

First of all, I want you to see, if we’re going to have an effective prayer life, I want you to see the confession that precedes it, that goes before it. Look. Verse 16: “Confess your faults one to another...”

Now may I say, dear friend, that most of us are good at concealing our faults. Isn’t that true? I mean, we move heaven and earth not to confess them, but to conceal them. We’re good at concealing our faults, criticizing our friends, and castigating our foes. But the Bible says we are to confess our faults one to another. I believe that the practice of the confession of fault is the forgotten key that is holding back revival, both in our churches and in our homes. And the reason we don’t want to confess our faults is because we’re trying to save face. We’re so full of rotten pride. And that’s the one thing we need to lose is this abominable pride. Pride goes before destruction. God resists the proud. He gives grace to the humble. Somebody said, “To err is human, and to cover it up is also.” Ha, ha. That’s what we try to do. We just, we just try to conceal our faults. But the Bible says that if we will confess our faults, we’ll be healed, we’ll be healed.

A. **Healing of the Body**

Now, what is that healing? It is physical healing. And I believe with all of my heart that God supernaturally heals beyond the doctor's art. I believe that with all of my heart. If I didn't believe that, I think I'd step down out of the pulpit, because I wouldn't believe in God. God can do anything He well pleases, and He does supernaturally and explicably heal people apart from the doctor's art. This is not to say that we don't believe in the doctors. We do. Jesus said, "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Jesus put His stamp of approval upon the ministry of godly physicians. But there are things that no doctor can do. And when the doctor says there's no hope, don't you believe it. There's a God in heaven, my dear friend. And I don't care who he is and how much he knows, he's not God. He's not God. And God can heal. Now God may not heal. It's not always God's will to heal. But God does heal. We'd better admit that.

B. **Healing of Relationships**

But not only is there the healing of the body. My dear friend, so many times there are healings of relationships. And I think that's where healing needs to begin, a restoration, when brother is set over against brother, and we confess our faults one to another. And then, there is not only, ah, that restoration, but then there's that reconciliation where festering sores or resentment and distrust begin to melt away. Homes are put back together and revival breaks out.

Miss Bertha Smith, one of our great missionaries to China, spoke in our church on a number of occasions, was a dear personal and warm friend of our family. She's now in heaven. Doctor Charlie Culpepper, who used to teach at Mid-America Seminary, both of them were in China in the great Shantung Revival. I heard them both say with a sense of awe and humility and quivering lips, "Oh, how God came down, when in that mission in China. Those missionaries, who were good and godly people, finally humbled themselves and began to confess their faults one to another and to pray one for another. And when they did that, God moved in mighty revival power."

Do you know the reason why many of us don't confess our faults one to another? Not only pride, but fear! We're afraid if we confessed our faults one to another people wouldn't like us. They might discover that we have some flaws. Don't worry about it, they already know it. They already know it!

Let me tell you what revival is. Revival is not just getting the roof off; revival is getting the walls down. Now many of us are glad to get the roof off. "God, You know my problems. You know my sins. You know my failures." The reason why is, we trust God; we just don't trust one another. We say, "I can tell God, but I can't tell one another." But listen. The Bible says, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another..."

Now you have to be careful about a confession of faults and the confession of sin, and I'll tell you why. Because the devil will even take a good thing and use it against

you! As a general rule, and I want you to remember this, that the confession of sin should be in keeping with the circle of sin. You don't have to broadcast your sins. In doing that, you may be casting pearls before swine.

Let me just give you a guide now for the confession of faults. Private fault – private confession. Suppose you're a man here tonight and you had a lustful thought. Maybe they're passing Playboy Magazine around the office and it ended up on your desk. You sat there and looked through it. Nobody saw you. Maybe you were in, by yourself and impure and ungodly thoughts came into your mind. The Holy Spirit of God convicted you of that. Confess it! "If we confess our sin, He's faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." You don't need to step out in the office and say, "Everybody, I want you to know I've been looking at Playboy Magazine and I just want to confess it." It'll probably do more harm than good. That, it, my dear friend, is a personal, private matter. Private sin – probably private confession with this one exception. If you have a prayer partner that you say, "I need special help. I want you to come alongside and pray."

Personal sin - personal confession. If you sin against me and harm me, come to me and ask me to forgive you. If I sin against you and harm you, I come to you and ask you to forgive me.

Public sin - public confession. You go out here and get drunk, wreck your automobile. You name the name of Jesus. Not only should you ask God to forgive you; you ought to say to your brothers and sisters in Christ, "God have mercy upon me. I disgraced the name of Jesus. I disgraced the name of my church. And I want God to have mercy upon me. I've asked God to forgive me, and I want you to forgive me."

The circle of confession and the circle of sin need to be kept in reasonableness. But what a day it's going to be when confession replaces criticism and compassion replaces condemnation. Confess your faults one to another. Very frankly, one of the reasons that we're not healed, one of the reasons that our prayers are not answered is, there is no confession.

II. The Intercession That Provides It

And so, I want you to see the confession that precedes it. Then I want you to see the intercession that provides it. I'm talking about the power of God, the healing power of God. Look, if you will again, in this passage. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that you may be healed...." Now the confession of a fault is always a call to prayer. When somebody confesses a fault, it's not a time to criticize; it's a time to pray. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another. Prayer, dear friend, as I said a few moments ago, is not preparation for service. Prayer is service, the most valuable service you can render. Someone has wisely said, "We can

do more than pray after we prayed, but we cannot do more than pray until we have prayed.” And nobody should attempt to do more than he can pray over. And the sick need more than your pity; they need your prayers. Those with faults need more than your criticism; they need your prayers. It’s a call to prayer.

Galatians chapter 6, verses, 1 and 2 says, “If a brother be overtaken in a fault, you which are spiritual restore such a one, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted.” Somebody said, “The Christian Army is the only army in the world that shoots its wounded.” When a person is overtaken in a fault, restore him. Pray for him. Love him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another. I hope the saints of Victoria will do that. I hope the saints here at Bellevue will do that.

III. The Illustration That Proves It

Now the third thing I want you to see, dear friend. It’s not only the command that we should obey or the intercession that provides it, but I want you to see the illustration that proves it. I want you to see the illustration that God uses here. He says, “...the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.” Now all he’s doing is preaching a sermon. He comes to this point and he says, “I’ll give you an illustration of what I’m talking about.” And he goes back into the Old Testament and he finds a man of prayer, Elijah, and he uses him as an illustration. “And he prayed again, and the earth gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.” And he tells something of the prayer life of Elijah. So, I want us to see what he’s talking about.

Just go back in your Bible, please, to 1st Kings chapter 18 and look in verse 42. You’re going to see that prayer. Now, if it’s an illustration, we might as well understand what he’s talking about. First Kings chapter 18 and verse 42. Look at it. “And so Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went to the top of Carmel (that’s a mountain there in Israel); and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees, and said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea...” That is, toward the Mediterranean. I’ve been on top of Mount Carmel. I’ve been right....I tried to imagine this scene as I looked out at the Mediterranean. “...look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man’s hand. And he said, Go up, say to Ahab, Prepare thy chariot and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not. And it came to pass in the meanwhile, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel. And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.” There’s so much there, but let

me just deal with part of it. We're talking now about the illustration that proves it.

Here was a man. The Bible says Elijah was a man of like passions as we are. Now somehow we get the idea that these people were wired differently than we are. Sometimes we get the idea that they breathed a different air than we breathe. I was in the supermarket the other day, and a lady met me. She said, "Oh, Doctor Rogers, do you eat, too?" (Yeah, I do, and I sleep, too. When I was a young preacher, somebody would call in the middle of the night. I'd clear my voice and say, "Hello," like I'd been up reading Lamentations all night or something like that. Sure, I eat, and sure, I sleep, and sure, I make mistakes, and so did Elijah. He was a man of like passions. You read the story.

He sat down under the juniper tree, was so discouraged he wanted to die! And Jezebel was on his trail. And he wasn't the first preacher wanted to die because some Jezebel was after him, either. He was a man who got discouraged. He was a man who was of like passions, that we say puts his trousers on one leg at a time. Don't get the idea that these promises, dear friend, are just for the super saints or some sort of people different than we are, or some sort of people in another age than we're in. I think Leonard Ravenhill said, "One of these days, somebody's going to pick up this book, read it, and believe it, and the rest of us are going to be ashamed of ourselves." I mean, we get the idea that these promises are, you know, they're more like, ah, mottos to be hung on the wall. They're not mottos to be hung on the wall; they're checks to be carried to the bank! - to believe God! Elijah was a man of like passions as we are, yet he prayed earnestly.

A. Pray with Integrity

And I want you to look at his prayer. First of all, I want you to see that you must pray with integrity. He was a righteous man. A righteous man is not a man that doesn't ever fail, but he is a man who knows how to confess his faults. "If we confess our sin, He's faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." You know, the major reason that God doesn't answer prayer is so incredibly clear that we ought not to be amazed. Proverbs 15, verse 29: "The LORD is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous." Now, isn't that plain? The Bible says, "The Lord's hand is not short, that He cannot save, neither is His ear heavy that He cannot hear." God is not palsied and God is not deaf. "But your sins have separated between you and your God, and your iniquities have hid His face from you, that He will not hear." If God were to hear the prayers of wicked people, He would be encouraging sin. He would be rewarding sin. It would be the worst thing that He could do. God wants to bless, but He doesn't want to encourage you into further sin. So, first of all, there must be integrity. It's amazing how we let sin keep us from getting our prayers answered.

Ha, in the south Pacific, they capture monkeys this way: They'll take a coconut, put a

hole in it about 2” or so in diameter, fasten the coconut to a tree, put a handful of rice in the coconut. The monkey will come along, look in the coconut, sense there’s rice in there, put his little monkey paw in there, get a handful of rice, and then he can’t get his hand back out because it’s bigger now than it was when he put it in there. And when they come to capture the little monkey, he will squeal and plead. He’ll do everything except let go of that rice. It’s amazing! I know people just like that. “Oh God, please, O God,” but they won’t let go of that sin. Amazing! “...the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Elijah was a man of like passions. He failed. He sinned. He wasn’t sinlessly perfect. Nobody is. We may not be sinless, but we ought to be blameless. Stand before God in holiness. What an affront to a holy God. We must pray with integrity (verse 42). Look at it here in....

“So Ahab went up to Edom to drink and Elijah went up to the top of Carmel...” He was a man, a righteous man.

B. **Pray with Intensity**

But not only must you pray with integrity; you must pray with intensity, intensity. Now the Bible says, “...the effectual fervent prayer, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” You know, the word *fervent*, *effectual fervent*, is, is, is one word in the Greek language. It literally means “stretched out.” It’s the idea if you watched an athlete run a race, maybe it’s the 100 yard dash or any race for that matter, and he’s coming to the tape, and he’s trying to be the first to break that tape. And he is stretching out to reach the tape. That’s how the word was used in corresponding literature. It was used of a horse, perhaps, also in a race, an animal, stretched out in some sort of an athletic endeavor. That is, that with every inch, every ounce, every nerve, every fiber. And I have to confess, dear folks, that I don’t like to pray that way. I just don’t like it. My flesh doesn’t like it. I like these little smooth prayers.

Why do you have to pray stretched out, reaching out? Well, I want to tell you, first of all, dear friend, the Savior did it. That’s the way Jesus prayed. Hebrews chapter 5 and verse 7. The Bible says, “...he offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears...” Do we pray with tears? Do we get hold of God and say, like Jacob, “Oh God, I will not let You go except You bless me?” God, have mercy upon our cold, glib, formal, take-it-or-leave-it type of prayers. Most of us don’t know what it is to really give ourselves to God in prayer. Look, if you will, in verse 42: ““So Ahab went up to Edom to drink...” Here’s this sinner Ahab up there in the midst of a crisis in his country. And what’s he doing? He’s up there eating and drinking, this sin-blinded, wicked, ungodly man. But here, here’s Elijah. Look at him. Do you see? It shows him praying. He cast himself down to the ground. Do you see it? That’s what he’s doing. He just throws himself down. He’s praying in a stretched-out way.

C. **Pray with Authority**

I want you to notice a third thing. Not only must we pray with integrity, a righteous man; not only must we pray with intensity, but we need to pray with authority. Look, if you will, in verse 43. The Bible says, “And he said to his servant, Go up now and look toward the sea; and he went up and looked and said, There is nothing. He said, Then go back and look again.” Seven times he said this. Now, why was he saying, “Look for rain?” Well, go back to chapter 18 and verse 1: “And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, show thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth.” That’s the reason why he said, “Go look for it. If you don’t see it now, go look again. If you don’t see it now, go look again. If you don’t see it now, go look again, and again, and again.” Why? I’ve got the Word of God to stand on. I’m praying with authority. I’m praying on the basis of a promise.

Now here’s a lesson. It’s a lesson to me; one of the greatest lessons in prayer that I know of. God had promised Elijah rain, and yet he still had to pray for it. I mean, he had a promise of God. Why didn’t he just say, “Hey, God’s going to send rain. He promised He’s going to send rain. That settles it. Why waste my time praying? No need to pray anymore because God has spoken clearly and plainly.” But, my dear friend, a promise from God is not where praying ends; that’s where praying begins. You get the promise first. The Word of the Lord is what encourages you to pray. It’s so hard for us to learn that God does not do things, even when He’s spoken His word and made clear about His will, until we lay hold of those promises in prayer. The great F. B. Meyer said this: “Though the Bible is crowned and crowded with golden promises from board to board, they will be inoperative until we turn them into prayers.” That’s deep water, folks. You could say, “Well, God said He’s going to do it. Why do I have to pray?” Elijah knew God was going to do it, and yet he is praying with intensity.

Oh my dear friend, we must pray. We must pray with integrity. We must pray with intensity. We must pray with authority. Do you know what faith is? Faith is getting a word from God and then refusing to let go until we see God answer.

D. **Pray with Humility**

Now, next, we must pray with humility, humility. Here is the man of God. Look at him. He’s on his face before God. The Bible says he, he has his, his head between his knees. You think you could put your head between your knees? Some of you have to do calisthenics, some of us. Let me see if I can put my head between my knees. I don’t think I’m going to try. Here is a man bent over. I mean, here is a man low before God. He cast himself down. God does business with those that mean business.

Now, when I say he’s humble, I didn’t mean that he was a milquetoast. Brother, he is bold as a lion when it comes to old Ahab, King of Israel. Ahab comes to him and says, “Hey, you’re the one troubling Israel.” He said, “No me, hot shot; you!” Well, he didn’t

call him hot shot, but that's what he said. "Not me; you and your house, King Ahab. You're the trouble maker."

I'm going to tell you something. A man who can kneel before God can stand before anybody, did you know that? And, brother, when you fear God, you, that just takes care of most of the other feelings. This man is bold as a lion in front of Ahab, but humble and meek as a lamb before God. I mean, he's just had an audience with the King of kings so he doesn't fear the old King Ahab. The Bible says in 1st Peter chapter 5, verse 6: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." This is the missing ingredient in most of our prayers. Have you ever heard anybody pray, "Oh God, make us humble?" First place, I'd be scared to death to pray that prayer. But the Bible says, "Humble yourselves..."

We need to pray with integrity. We need to pray with intensity. We need to pray with authority. We need to pray with humility. A pastor is really not much different than what he is in his prayer closet. Well, it's not only true of a pastor. It's true of a daddy, a mom, a student, anybody, for that matter.

E. Pray with Persistency

Last of all, we need to pray with persistency, persistency. Just keep on praying. Look in verse 43: "He said to his servant, Go up now and look toward the sea. And he went up and looked, and said, There is nothing. He said, Go up again seven times. And it came to pass on the seventh time that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not." Seven times he looks for the answer. Six times there was no answer. Suppose at the end of the sixth time, he said, "Just as I thought. It doesn't do any good to pray." The Bible says in Colossians chapter 4, verse 2: "Continue in prayer...."

We've learned many times from this pulpit that God's delays are not denials. Isaiah 30, verse 18: "Therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment (that is, discernment. He knows when to answer and how to answer): blessed are all they that wait on him." If God doesn't answer us immediately, He's just teaching us the lessons of humility and patience and grace.

At first, Elijah learns there's the cloud about the size of a man's hand. That's what it looked like on the horizon. I read somewhere where somebody said Elijah just pressed his hands so hard against heaven, he left his handprint up there. "Oh God, hear my prayer." And the earth, the sky becomes black with clouds, and God answers prayer.

Conclusion

I need to be more in prayer, and I think many of you do. And by God's grace, I will be

and I want you to be. "...the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."
Father, teach us to pray. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Healing Power of Prayer

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: October 14, 1984

Main Scripture Text: James 5:16–18

“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”

JAMES 5:16

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Introduction

I want you to take your Bibles tonight and turn with me to the fifth chapter of the book of James. That wonderful book of James that deals with such practicalities, things that we need to know and learn and to hear over and over again.

Tonight I want to speak to you on the healing power of prayer, on the healing power of prayer. James chapter 5 and verse 16: *“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And, he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit”* (James 5:16–18).

The Healing Power of Prayer. I want you to know that I believe as surely as I’m standing here that God heals. I believe that God heals naturally, I believe that God

heals supernaturally, I believe that God heals instantaneously, and I believe that God heals in time, but I believe he is the Lord our God who heals all of our diseases. I believe that God heals through medicine and I thank God for the doctors and I believe that God heals through miracle and he heals beyond the doctors' art.

We have some very fine medical doctors here in our congregation as I look out among them, and the thing that thrills my heart is to know that these men while they're men of science are also spiritual men, and they're men of prayer, and these are men who pray and ask God to do what they themselves cannot do. And, I believe that God has healed me and answered a prayer. I believe there's some of you that are here tonight who have been healed because of the prayers of God's people, and God has miraculously, supernaturally, intervened and healed you in a way that He would not have healed you had we not prayed. Oh, I believe ladies and gentlemen, that many of us, many of us have forfeited the blessing of God because we've not learned something of the healing power of prayer.

Now, prayer is a powerful force. One man that will always bless you if you read what he's written is Andrew Murray. Andrew Murray was a man that walked with God. Andrew Murray said this in relation to prayer. He said, "In relation to his people, God works only in answer to their prayer." Now, that's a big statement. He didn't say, "God works in answer to their prayer," but "in relation to God's people", Andrew Murray said, "God works only in answer to their prayer." And then he said, "In prayer we change our natural strength for the supernatural strength of God." We change our natural strength for the supernatural strength of God.

Dr. R. A. Torrey, whom I quote frequently, said this, "Nothing lies beyond the reach of prayer except that that lies outside the will of God." Nothing lies beyond the reach of prayer except that that lies outside the will of God. Another great preacher of yesteryear said this. Dr. A. C. Dickson said, "When we depend upon organization, we get what organization can do, and that's something. When we depend upon education, we get what education can do, and that is something. When we depend upon money, we get what money can do, and that is something. When we depend upon singing and preaching, we get what they can do, and that is something." But, then Dr. A. C. Dickson said, "When we depend upon prayer, we will get what God can do." And, then this great preacher went on to say, "What all the churches and all the homes and all the schools and all the individuals need is what God can do, and how shall we get what God can do? By prayer out of hearts that are right with God."

Now, the message tonight is going to deal with the healing power of prayer, but I want to remind you that there is more than the healing of the body. There are souls that need to be healed. There are churches that need to be healed. There are homes that need to be healed. There are fellowships that need to be healed. There are spirits that

need to be healed. There are minds that need to be healed and indeed there are bodies that need to be healed. Now, James tells us how to pray so as to bring the healing power of God into our bodies, into our minds, into our spirits, into our homes, into our relationships so that God, who is the God that heals our diseases, will move in and heal us. Several things I want you to notice.

I. The Confession That Precedes It

First of all, I want you to notice the confession that precedes this kind of healing, the confession that precedes it. Notice verse 16, “Confess your faults one to another.” Now, ladies and gentlemen, this perhaps is the reason that we don’t see more healing. This is the reason that we don’t see more answered prayer. This is the reason that prayers are not answered in other realms as well as in the realm of healing. We are great at concealing our sins rather than confessing our sins.

Now, we love to criticize our friends and castigate our foes, but we don’t like to confess our faults. But, the Bible doesn’t say we’re to criticize our friends, the Bible doesn’t say we’re to castigate our foes. The Bible says that we are to confess our faults, but that’s the last thing any of us want to do. “To err is human,” to cover it up is also (Alexander Pope). We don’t want to confess our faults, but I’ll tell you, there are some definite results that come when we obey what James said here in the Word of God when we confess our faults.

The very first thing that begins is there is restoration, there is healing. Confess your faults one to another and pray one for another that you may be healed. God begins to heal homes. God begins to heal relationships. God begins to heal minds. God begins to heal spirits and God begins to heal bodies. Not only is there restoration, there is reconciliation. Did you know that when we begin to confess our faults that God just brings us together as we confess our faults one to another? There are many people here who have resentment against someone else, if this is an average church and an average crowd. And, those resentments have been festering and festering and festering. Now, when we begin to confess our faults one to another you’re going to find that the festering sores of resentment and distrust begin to evaporate and begin to melt away. There is restoration, there is reconciliation, and there is revival that comes when we confess our faults one to another and pray for one another. You can study the history of revival. And, you’re going to find out that every great revival is marked, absolutely marked and saturated with this one thing that I’m talking about, a confession of fault one to another.

Now, most of us are trying to save face and that’s the one thing we need to lose. Most of us are trying to maintain our dignity rather than have revival. I remember hearing Dr. Charlie Culpepper and Ms. Bertha Smith tell of the great Shantung revival.

And, they said that the mark of that revival that was so powerful there in China that the missionaries began to confess their faults one to another and pray one for another. If you study the history of revival in the great awakening it began when people began to confess their faults one to another and pray one for another.

It was true in the book of Acts. Turn to Acts chapter 19 with me for a moment and look if you will in verse 18, Acts 19:18. I want you to notice a mighty revival that took place. The Bible says in verse 18, *“And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.”* And, what was the result of confession and repentance? That is getting rid of the books on the occult and burning those things and destroying those things and being open with brothers and sisters and confessing their faults and saying pray for me and I pray for you. What was the result of it? Look in verse 20. *“So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed”* (Acts 19:20). That is, the Word of God spread and the Word of God had power because there was confession in the church.

Do you know what real revival is? Do you know what real spiritual power is? It is not just getting the roof off. It is getting the walls down. You say, “What do you mean by that, preacher?” Many of us are content to confess our sins to the Lord, to confess our faults to the Lord, we’re glad to get the roof off, but we sure don’t want to get the walls down, do we? I mean, we don’t want anybody else to know what’s in our hearts, we don’t want anybody else to know where we failed. We don’t want anybody else to know our faults and we refuse to get the walls down. But, dear friend, real revival, genuine revival, revival from above, revival that heals, revival that restores, revival that reconciles is revival where we confess our faults not only to God, but to one another.

Now, having said that, I want to say something about the confession of sin. The confession of sin needs to be in keeping with the circle of sin. Now, the devil can use even the confession of sin to his advantage if people are not wise and if people are not scriptural. The Bible does not teach that we should necessarily broadcast our sins to everybody indiscriminately. We may find ourselves casting *“...pearls before swine...”* (Matthew 7:6).

A. Private Confession

And, the circle of sin and the circle of confession need to be relatively the same. For example, if there’s private sin in your heart and in your life then there needs to be private confession before God and God alone. The exception to that is you may include your prayer partner if you have somebody that you can trust who is very intimate and you pray with that person and say, “Help me, I’ve had the problem of lust or I’ve had the problem of pride, I’ve had the problem of selfishness, I’ve had the problem, it is a

personal problem, it is within me.”

And, that is private sin that is private confession. Now, what about personal sin? And by personal sin, I mean sin against another person. If I sin against Mike, I need to confess to Mike, I need to tell Mike between him and myself alone, and ask Mike to forgive me. If it's gone no further than that then between Mike and myself I need to confess my fault and say Mike, this is where I failed you or this is where I abused you or misused you or this is the way I've sinned against you and Mike, for Jesus' sake, please forgive me.

Now, that's not going to drive a wedge between Mike and myself, that's going to put a bond of love around us. I've had people come to me and confess to me some feeling that they've had toward me or some resentment they've had toward me. I want to tell you ladies and gentlemen, that has never caused me to think less of any individual who's ever done that—always to think more, always to love that person, and always to esteem that person more—because I know what torture sometimes a person goes through before they can come and humble themselves and say, “I want you to forgive me.” But, I tell you, I feel the power of Jesus when someone does that. I feel the flutter of angels' wings when someone does that, when we begin to confess our faults one to another.

B. Public Confession

And, then dear friend, when there is public sin there needs to be public confession. When a person is openly, outwardly, notoriously wickedly sinned and it's a matter of public knowledge then not only do you need to get right individually and not only get right before God. You need to get right before the church, you need to get right before the community. And, the prayer of healing, there is a confession that precedes it. What a day it will be in our churches when confession replaces criticism and compassion replaces condemnation. We need to learn to confess our faults one to another and pray one for another.

II. The Intercession That Provides It

Now, I've talked to you about the confession that precedes it. Now, I want to talk to you a little bit about the intercession that provides it. I'm talking about healing now and the intercession that provides it. Look again in verse 16. “Confess your faults one to another and pray one for another that you may be healed.” Now, the confession of a fault is not a call to criticism, it is a call to prayer. And, God wants us to pray to Him. God encourages us to pray to Him.

Now, listen, let me teach you something about prayer tonight. Prayer is not preparation for service. Prayer is service. Prayer is not getting ready to minister, prayer is ministry in and of itself and don't tell me therefore there's no ministry that you can

have. If you can pray you can minister. It is the most valuable service you can render and you may do more than pray after you've prayed but you can't do more than pray until you've prayed, if what Andrew Murray said is correct that God works only in answer to the prayer of his people.

Now, the sick need more than your pity. They need your prayers and those who are sinful need more than your compassion, they need your prayer and the Bible teaches very clearly and very plainly that we're to pray one for another. I think that someone was quite correct when he said that the Christian army is the only army in the world that shoots its wounded. Now, when a person is in a fault the Bible says in Galatians chapter 6 verse 1: *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted"* (Galatians 6:1).

A. The Intensity of the Prayer

Now, are we to pray then? Look at this prayer of intercession. What kind of a prayer is it to be? Well, look in verse 16. "The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Now, that word "effectual, fervent" and it is a word although it's two words in the English, it's one word in the Greek, and the "effectual, fervent" prayer of a righteous man tells us exactly what our prayer is to be. Now, listen, this word here, "effectual, fervent" is a word that literally means "stretched out." We could read it this way. The stretched out prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Now, the idea of stretched out is the idea of a horse that is running at full gallop and you've seen pictures of a horse with his front legs and his back legs out this way and he is stretched out. Or, you've seen perhaps an athlete who is running for the goal and the ribbon is there and he's trying to break the ribbon and with all of his heart he is stretched out. Now, he's not talking about being stretched out upon your bed therefore. What he is talking about is prayer that is intense, fervent, like an athlete, with every nerve, every ounce, every inch, every fiber, stretched out, intense prayer.

I believe that one of the faults of our praying to day is that so much of our prayer is lackadaisical. Good Lord, Good devil, now I lay me down to sleep type of prayer, take it or leave it type of prayer. But, if you will read in the Bible the prayers of some of God's saints you're going to find out that these saints prayed as they stretched themselves out before God and got hold of God. In Genesis chapter 32 verse 6 Jacob prayed and he got hold of God and he said, "Oh God, I will not let you go until you bless me."

I've had to pray that way sometimes. I tell you, I've gotten on my knees and tried to pray, and all of the forces of Hell come against me. My mind will run like a squirrel cage. I get sleepy, I gather wool, I start saying one thing talking to God and thinking about something else. My knees begin to hurt and my body aches and all kinds of things happen to me. Does that ever happen to you? Boy, that makes me feel better. And, the

devil will let loose all of the artillery of Hell to keep me from praying. And, I have to say like Jacob sometime, Lord, I'm not going to let you go. If I die on my knees I'm going to stay here until I have a consciousness of your presence, 'til I'm in Heaven's throne. And, when I come to that place it's not long till I'm there too.

You know, God does business with those that mean business and James says the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Like when we went to Korea and saw those churches in Korea. Bob and Buna, the one thing that I was impressed about more than anything else in their praying was the fervency of their prayer. We have a group tonight that's going to Korea and we're going to send them off with prayer just after the close of this service. But, those Korean people where God is moving in a spirit of revival, they're praying fervently. I mean, the Spirit of God is there and they are meaning business with God and James says the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

B. The Integrity of the Prayer

Now, not only is James talking about the intensity of the prayer, but he's also talking about the integrity of the prayer. The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man, that is, a man whose heart is clean before God. So much of our praying is a smoke screen to cover up our sin, and we don't intend to confess our sin, we just want God to bless us. It's sort of blessed us anyhow, but dear friend, the Bible says we're to confess our faults one to another and then we're to pray one for another that we may be healed and until there's that confession there cannot be that proper intercession. It is the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man that availeth much.

Proverbs chapter 15, verse 29: *"The LORD is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous"* (Proverbs 15:29). Now, if it is sin in your heart, God, as far as you're concerned, is ten thousand miles away. Psalm chapter 66 and verse 18: *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me..."* (Psalm 66:18). That's what God's word says. Isaiah 59, verses 1 and 2: *"Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear"* (Isaiah 59:1-2). It's not that God cannot hear, but it is that God will not hear.

Now, I spoke this morning of positional righteousness, that is one kind of righteousness, that is, when I receive Christ as my personal Savior, when I repent of my sin and trust Christ, positionally I am saved. God imputes righteousness to me and in the sight of God I am righteous, I am going to Heaven. But, I want to tell you there's more than positional righteousness, there is practical righteousness, and there is more than imputed righteousness there is imparted righteousness. And, even though I may be saved and even though my sin may be under the blood, if there's unconfessed,

unrepented sin in my life, if there's not practical righteousness, and if I'm not walking before God, then I have no right to expect God to hear my prayer. As a matter of fact, God has promised that He will not hear my prayer.

Now, I don't know about you, but it's important to me that God hears my prayers. Many of you have heard the illustration of how they catch monkeys in the South Sea Islands. Do you know what they do? They take a coconut and strap a coconut to a palm tree. They hollow out a hole in the top of that coconut, and it's a small hole, so small that the monkey can just straighten out his fingers and slip his fingers into that hole. Well, why would a monkey slip his fingers in to that hole? Because they put some rice in the hole and there's rice on the inside of the coconut. And, the monkey wanting the rice will slip his paw into the coconut and he'll take a fistful of rice. Now, while his fist is balled up like that and doubled up he cannot withdraw it from the hole in the coconut and then the captor comes along and he has him a monkey. Well, you say, "Stupid monkey, all he has to do is let go of the rice." That's right, but he will not do it, he will stay there and beg, and scream, and cry, and chatter, and wiggle, but he'll never open his hand and let go of that rice, stupid monkey.

I know some people who will get before God and they will beg, and plead, and cry, and whimper, and ask God to hear their prayers, but they will not let go of that sin. They will not. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. There is no sin worth not having your prayers answered. Oh, dear friend, think of the intensity of the prayer, think of the integrity of the prayer, the effectual, fervent, stretched out prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Dear friend, this is the kind of praying that we need to pray.

III. The Illustration That Proves It

Now, one last thing, I'm talking to you about the confession that precedes it. The intercession that provides it, and now think with me about the illustration that proves it, the illustration that proves it. Notice here what James does. He illustrates it. Any good sermon ought to have an illustration and James illustrates it with Elias. That's the New Testament name for the Old Testament Elijah so with your permission or even without your permission I'll read it this way. "Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months and he prayed again and the Heaven gave rain and the earth brought forth her fruit."

Now, God doesn't want us to misunderstand this thing and so He gives us a wonderful illustration of the prayer that heals. Now, in order for you to understand that illustration I want you to turn to the passage of scripture that James is talking about. And, that means that you turn backward in your Bible to 1 Kings chapter 18, all right?

Turn to it. 1 Kings, chapter 18. Now, you will remember that there was sickness in the land of Israel. There was the need of revival and there was a drought that was there because of the sins of God's people.

Now, I'm going to begin reading here in 1 Kings 18:42. This is the illustration that James is talking about when he said that Elijah was a man of like passions as we are and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain. 1 Kings 18:42–45: *“So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees, And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down that the rain stop thee not. And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain.”*

Now, what does all this tell us? That is the illustration that James was talking about. This is the illustration that proves it and what James is saying is this. That if God heard the prayer of Elijah when Elijah met God's conditions that God will hear the prayer of Adrian when Adrian meets God's commission.

A. The Person of the Prayer

Now, notice the person of the prayer. It was Elijah. Now, listen, James said that Elijah was a man of like passions, as we are. Have you ever read these stories of men in the Bible and thought that sometimes they lived in a different world, and they breathed a different air, and that somehow they were not like us, and that somehow God showed them favors that He doesn't show us? Have you ever done that? I have sometimes. I just think, “Well, they just weren't like us.” James says, “Forget that stuff, they were just like us.” Elijah was not an extraordinary man, he was an ordinary man. He was a man of like passions and I can prove it because right here in chapter 18 he has a wonderful victory and in chapter 19 you find him running from Jezebel. I mean, you find him, he gets so depressed that he puts his face upon the ground and asks God to kill him and prays that he might die. It makes me feel better that if God can answer a prayer for a man like him then maybe he can answer a prayer for me. Amen. Well, now let's say for you. “Amen.” You see, he was an ordinary man, he wasn't a perfect man.

B. The Place of the Prayer

Now, notice not only the person of the prayer, but notice the place of the prayer. Look again if you will in verse 42 of this chapter. The Bible says that Ahab went out, went up to eat and to drink and Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel and he cast himself down upon the earth. That old sot, Ahab, the king of Israel is down there eating and

drinking. And, that's the problem with so many of us. We know a lot about feasting, we know little about fasting. We know a lot about parties, but we know a little about prayer.

But, here was a man who knew how to get alone with God, he got up there on the mountaintop alone with God. He withdrew from the crowd. Jesus told us to *“pray to thy Father which is in secret...”* (Matthew 6:6). And, the secret of my ministry, the secret of your teaching, and the measure of your life is not how well you preach or teach in public, but how you pray in private. And, I want to tell you, as I say, “That frightens me. That frightens me.” But, it encourages me and it instructs me. Here was a man who knew how to get alone with God in prayer.

And, this is the illustration now that James is using, the person of the prayer of an ordinary man. The place of the prayer. He found a place where he could get alone with God and in this particular place it was the top of Carmel, Mount Carmel, I've been there many times. I thought of the old prophet praying up there. He withdrew from the crowds. Jesus did exactly the same thing.

C. The Posture of the Prayer

Notice the posture of the prayer. Look in verse 42. And, he cast himself down upon the earth and put his face between his knees. Here was a man whose humiliates himself before God. If My people which are called by My name shall humble themselves. He didn't strut into the presence of God. Here's a man bowed down with his head between his knees, humiliated, broken before God. Do you know why he was bold as a lion when he was brought before Ahab? Because he knew how to kneel before God. And, a man who knows how to kneel before God can stand before anybody else. Who's going to fear King Ahab when he's just had an audience with the King of kings? Here's a man who's gotten alone on his knees before God. But, notice not only the posture of the prayer. Notice the passion of the prayer.

D. The Passion of the Prayer

Look again in verse 42. The Bible says, “And, he cast himself down,” he didn't just kneel. I see this man in great intensity. The idea is here that he is stretched out, and he throws himself down before the Lord. He means business with God. This is what James is talking about when he says the effectual, fervent prayer, the stretched out prayer of a righteous man availeth much. The passion of the prayer. Prayer is seeking, prayer is asking, prayer is knocking. You say, “Well, I just don't believe the Lord just wants all that emotion. I don't believe the Lord wants all that intensity.”

Well, maybe you know more how to pray than the Lord Jesus, but let me tell you how the Lord Jesus prayed in Hebrews chapter 5 verse 7. The Bible says, *“he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears”* (Hebrews 5:7). Jesus, prayers and supplication with strong crying and tears. Now, it's not easy to pray. I'd

rather preach an hour than pray for half an hour. You say, "I believe that." I'd rather do almost anything as far as physical strain on my body than to spend the extended power, a time in prayer. The concentration, the effort, and the energy. I'll tell you dear friend, that all of the powers of Hell are going to come against you when you pray and when you intercede with Almighty God.

E. The Persistence of the Prayer

But, here is what I want to call the passion of the prayer. And, I want you to notice the persistence of the prayer. Look again in verse 43. And, he said to his servant, "Go up now and look toward the sea." And, he went up and looked and said, "There's nothing." And, he said, "Go again seven times." That is, here is Elijah and he's praying for rain. He says, "Oh God, oh God, send rain, we need rain." "Servant, go see if you see a cloud." No cloud. "Oh God, send rain, God, we need rain, God, hear my prayer." "Servant, go see if you see a cloud." He prayed, he prayed, he prayed, he prayed, he prayed, he prayed and he did not stop praying.

Luke 18 verse 1: *"And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint"* (Luke 18:1). I cannot tell you why God makes us keep asking. I cannot tell you why we must sometimes importune and just continue to ask God, but the Bible says *"And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you"* (Luke 11:9). That's what the language means, it's something that we just keep on doing, and we press through in prayer. Here was a man who asked and he continued to ask and he pressed his hand against Heaven. Somebody said, "Until there was handprint left there in Heaven a cloud about the size of a man's hand and finally the answer came and God, whose delays are not denials, answered the prayer." Let me tell you something. Colossians 4 verse 2, the Bible says, *"Continue in prayer..."* (Colossians 4:2). Continue in prayer and watch in the same. Isaiah 30:18: *"...therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you..."* Keep on praying, keep on praying, the last thing, the power of the prayer. Look in verse 45. "And it came to pass in the meanwhile that the Heaven was black with clouds and wind and there was a great rain."

Conclusion

Now, that's the illustration that James uses when he tells us how to pray for healing. It is not always God's will to heal. It is not always God's will to send rain, but I'm telling you ladies and gentlemen, when we know the heart and mind of God many times we do not have the will of God because we do not pray. We have not because we ask not. How to pray for healing, James has told us. There's the confession that precedes it. There's the intercession that provides it, there's the illustration that proves it. The man Elijah was a man just like you and like me, an ordinary man who did extraordinary things. Let's pray.