

LIFE-STUDY OF JAMES

MESSAGE ONE

INTRODUCTION AND PRACTICAL VIRTUES OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

(1)

Scripture Reading: James 1:1-12

In our Life-study of the Bible we have covered all the books of the New Testament except the books of James, Mark, Luke, and Acts. Of the twenty-three books we have covered thus far, ten are especially strategic: Matthew, John, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Hebrews, 1 John, and Revelation. We may also regard 1 and 2 Corinthians among the strategic New Testament books, bringing the number of these books to twelve.

I would encourage all the saints to have a thorough review of the twenty-three New Testament books we have covered in our Life-study. I would encourage you to read the Recovery Versions with the notes and cross-references and also to read the Life-study Messages on each book. If you do this, you will enrich yourselves and you will also enrich the Lord's recovery. If we are saturated with these riches, we shall be able to share these riches with others in three ways: by preaching the gospel, by presenting the truth, and by ministering life. Then if you meet someone who opposes the Lord's recovery, you will not need to vindicate or argue. Instead, do these three things: preach the gospel, present the truth, and minister life. But in order to do these things, we ourselves must first be equipped.

There is no doubt that the saints in the recovery love the Lord. But even though you love the Lord Jesus, you may not yet have the spiritual skill or the spiritual capital

with which to preach the gospel, to present the truth, and to minister life. This is the reason I encourage you to gain the spiritual education and become saturated with all the riches contained in the messages on the various New Testament books we have covered. The more you are saturated with these riches, the more you will be equipped to preach the gospel in different ways to different people. You will also be able to present the truth to other Christians. Every genuine Christian loves the truth. If you present the truth to a fellow believer, he will be attracted by it. Many of us came into the Lord's recovery because we were attracted by the truth. Furthermore, in addition to knowing how to preach the gospel and present the truth, you will be able to minister life by testifying to others how you have experienced Christ, the all-inclusive One, as your life and life supply.

The number of the saints in the Lord's recovery in the United States is still small, only about eight thousand. But if all the saints in the recovery would be saturated with the riches of the Word, they would become living witnesses. Then the Lord's recovery would have thousands of reporters, thousands of saints preaching the gospel, presenting the truth, and ministering life. Imagine what kind of work could be accomplished if we all were equipped in this way!

However, a good number of saints have not yet been equipped to preach the gospel, present the truth, or minister life. When these saints come in contact with others, it seems that they do not have the word to present to them, although they have the heart to do this. Even more are not able to minister life to others. This is the reason I encourage the saints to become saturated with the riches the Lord has given to us through the years. These riches are available for us in the Life-study Messages.

DIFFERENT ATTITUDES TOWARD THE BOOK OF JAMES

With this message we begin the Life-study of the Epistle of James. Believers have held different attitudes toward this book. Martin Luther, the great reformer used

by the Lord to begin the recovery, said that the Epistle of James was an "epistle of straw." However, certain Christians, especially some Chinese Christians, appreciate this book because it fits in with their ethical background, a back-ground that emphasizes ethical and moral perfection. These Christians especially appreciate the book of James in the New Testament and the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament. In the West, when the New Testament is printed separately from the Old Testament, it is often printed with the book of Psalms. But in the Orient, when the New Testament is printed separately, it often includes the book of Proverbs. It seems that Christians in the West like the Psalms, whereas Christians in the Orient like Proverbs.

According to the concept of some, the book of James is similar to the book of Proverbs. This similarity can be seen in the illustrations James uses in his Epistle: the surge of the sea (1:6), the flower of the grass (1:10), the sun with scorching heat (1:11). As we shall see when we come to chapter three, in dealing with the problem of the tongue, James uses twenty different items for his illustrations (3:3-12). In 4:14 James uses vapor as an illustration of human life, and in 5:7 he uses the illustration of a farmer waiting for his crop to ripen. These illustrations give the Epistle of James a proverbial character. Therefore, those who especially appreciate the book of Proverbs also appreciate this Epistle. As we shall see later in this Life-study, I also appreciate this Epistle, but I appreciate it for a very different reason.

A SLAVE OF GOD AND OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

The Epistle of James opens like this: "James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." James was a flesh brother of the Lord Jesus (Matt. 13:55) and of Jude (Jude 1). He was not one of the twelve Apostles chosen by the Lord while He was on earth, but he became one of the apostles after the Lord's resurrection (Gal. 1:19) and the leading elder in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:2, 13; 21:18), reputed with Peter and John to be a pillar of

the church, and mentioned by Paul as the first among the three pillars (Gal. 2:9).

In 1:1 James refers to himself as "a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." Here James ranks the Lord Jesus equally with God. This was contrary to Judaism, which did not recognize the deity of the Lord (John 5:18).

When James was with the Lord Jesus in the flesh, he probably did not listen to Him, and at least to some extent he may have despised Him. We find an example of this in John 7. But after the Lord's crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, this flesh brother of the Lord Jesus became such a believer in Him that he regarded his elder brother as having the same rank as God. This was the reason James could speak of himself as a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

James clearly recognized the deity of the Lord Jesus. I admire James for recognizing that Jesus, his brother in the flesh, is God and for saying that he was a slave of God and of this One who is the Lord. This part of James' writing is wonderful.

THE TWELVE TRIBES

In 1:1 James goes on to say, "To the twelve tribes in the dispersion: rejoice!" The twelve tribes here refer to the tribes of Israel. This indicates that this Epistle was written to Christian Jews, who had the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory (2:1) and were justified by faith (2:24), regenerated by the word of truth (1:18), and indwelt by the Spirit of God (4:5), and who were members of the church (5:14), awaiting the Lord's coming back (5:7-8). However, to call these believers in Christ the twelve tribes, as God's chosen people in His Old Testament economy, may also indicate the lack of a clear view concerning the distinction between Christians and Jews, between God's New Testament economy and the Old Testament dispensation, that God in the New Testament has delivered and separated the Jewish believers in Christ from the Jewish nation, which was then considered by God as a "perverse generation" (Acts 2:40). In His New Testament economy God no longer considers the Jewish

believers as Jews for Judaism but as Christians for the church. They, as the church of God, should be as distinct and separate from the Jews as from the Gentiles (1 Cor. 10:32). Yet, James, as a pillar of the church, in his Epistle to the Christian brothers, still called them the twelve tribes. (This may be the reason that he addressed the word in 5:1-6 to the rich class among the Jews in general.) This was contrary to God's New Testament economy.

In 1:1 James did not address the believers among the twelve tribes; he simply addressed the twelve tribes. These twelve tribes are the Jewish nation. But on the day of Pentecost Peter called the Jewish nation a "perverse generation": "And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Be saved from this perverse generation" (Acts 2:40, lit.). This perverse generation was composed of the twelve tribes of Israel. Some, however, may point out that in 1:1 James addresses the twelve tribes in the dispersion. This dispersion must have included the scattering of the Jewish believers from Jerusalem by the persecution after Pentecost (Acts 8:1, 4). But surely not all those in the dispersion were Christian Jews. Therefore, it is nonetheless a fact that James uses a term given by God to His chosen people in the Old Testament economy. In the Old Testament dispensation God considered the Jews the twelve tribes. But on the day of Pentecost Peter, speaking through the Holy Spirit, considered them a perverse generation and charged them to be saved.

Was James wrong in addressing his Epistle to the twelve tribes in the dispersion? To be sure, he did not think this was wrong. However, as we have pointed out, this form of address may indicate that James was not clear concerning the distinction between Christians and Jews and the distinction between God's New Testament economy and the Old Testament dispensation.

In 1 Corinthians 10:32 we see three categories of people: "Give no occasion of stumbling both to Jews and to Greeks and to the church of God." Here we see that in New Testament times people were of three classes: the Jews--God's chosen people; the Greeks--the unbelieving Gentiles;

and the church--a composition of the believers in Christ. This indicates that Jewish believers should be regarded as Christians for the church, which is distinct and separate both from the Jews and the Gentiles. Therefore, the Jews who were believers in Christ were part of the church and should not be classified with those Jews who were still part of the perverse generation. In the last chapter of his Epistle, James considered the recipients as members of the church. How, then, could he classify the members of the church with the Jews who were the perverse generation? This certainly indicates the lack of a clear view concerning God's dispensational economy.

PRACTICAL CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

At the end of 1:1 James tells the recipients of his Epistle to rejoice. The word "rejoice" is a translation of the Greek word *chairein*, which means to be happy, rejoice, hail; it was a word used for greeting or farewell.

The subject of the Epistle of James is practical Christian perfection. James writes not merely concerning Christian perfection, but concerning practical Christian perfection, that is, a perfection that is not theoretical but practical in our daily living. It is a strong point of this Epistle that James teaches regarding this practical Christian perfection. The many virtues he covers in this book are related to this perfection. In 1:2 James begins to present these virtues to us.

ENDURING TRIALS BY FAITH

In 1:2 James says, "Count it all joy, my brothers, whenever you fall into various trials." Here we see that the first virtue related to practical Christian perfection covered by James is that of enduring trials by faith.

The entire world lies in the evil one, Satan (1 John 5:19). Satan opposes God continually in every possible way. Satan is displeased whenever people turn to God, and he will not tolerate this. Once a person turns to God, Satan will instigate others to persecute that one. Paul once said that we Christians are appointed to suffer persecution (Phil. 1:29). Persecution, therefore, is the portion appointed to us as believers in Christ. Hence, the first

aspect of practical Christian perfection is to endure trials, a word that includes persecution.

Persecution is a suffering. However, trials are not merely a suffering, for trials are a suffering that serves the purpose of trying or proving us. We may use final examinations in school as an illustration. Students know that final examinations can be a real suffering and trial. But such a trial is actually a help to the students. If there were no final examinations in school, the students would probably be careless concerning their studies. But when they know that a final examination is coming, they concentrate on their studies with much diligence. Therefore, a final examination helps a student learn the necessary material. For this reason, the parents of those who are students should be grateful for the final examinations, knowing that this helps their children to profit from their education.

There are also "finals" and other kinds of "examinations" in the "school of spiritual education." The "principal" of this school is our heavenly Father. He has arranged different trials for us, different examinations. All these trials are good for us. Just as examinations are good for students, so the various trials we face as Christians are a profit to us.

Perhaps after you believed in the Lord Jesus, you thought that in the Christian life there would be no sufferings or trials. You may have said to yourself, "I fear God, I love the Lord Jesus, and I am a child of God. Surely God loves me, and He will not allow anything bad to happen to me." This is the concept of many believers. But eventually trials come. One kind of trial is opposition from family and friends. Such a trial is more than mere persecution. Persecution accomplishes the purpose of the persecutor, but trials are used by God to accomplish His purpose. Someone may persecute you, but God uses that persecution as a trial to test you, to prove you.

A final examination serves the threefold purpose of trying, testing, and proving a student. Likewise, the various trials through which we must pass as believers serve the purpose of trying, testing, and proving us. These

trials are surely a help in our practical Christian perfection, for God uses them to perfect us.

PERFECTED THROUGH TRIALS

God uses trials to perfect us. If we see this, we shall thank God for perfecting us through trials. Trials not only help us in the matters of our spiritual education and the experience of life, but also help us with our character and our behavior in our daily living. Before you believed in the Lord, you may have been like a wild lion. But after a period of time of trial, the "lion" has been tamed. I can testify that God has used trials to "tame" me and thereby to perfect me in a practical way in my Christian life.

In 1:2 James even encourages us to "count it all joy" whenever we fall into various trials. The reason we can count it a joy when we fall into trials is that these trials perfect us. Notice that in 1:2 James speaks not only of trials but of "various trials." This indicates that we should count all trials a joy, not just certain trials. On the one hand, we do not like trials, opposition, and persecution. But on the other hand we should count it all joy when we experience such things because God uses them to perfect us.

LIFE-STUDY OF JAMES

MESSAGE TWO

PRACTICAL VIRTUES OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

(2)

Scripture Reading: James 1:1-12

In 1:2 James exhorts us to count it all joy whenever we fall into various trials. In verse 3 he goes on to say, "Knowing that the proving of your faith produces endurance." Faith here is the Christian faith given by God in Christ (2:1; Eph. 2:8).

THE PROVING OF FAITH PRODUCING ENDURANCE

James says in verse 3 that the proving of our faith, the trying and testing of our faith, produces endurance. I can testify that my endurance has increased as a result of opposition and trial. The testings that we suffer produce endurance.

Endurance is different from patience. It is possible to be patient without having much endurance. Our patience may be fragile. What we need is an enduring patience. This enduring patience is endurance.

When you are mistreated by someone, you may first exercise patience. But you will learn that patience alone is not adequate, because in the suffering of trials you also need endurance. Endurance comes out of the proving, the trying, the testing, of our faith.

COMPLETE AND ENTIRE

In verse 4 James continues, "And let endurance have its complete work, that you may be complete and entire, lacking in nothing." Although James may not have had a clear view concerning the distinction between grace and

law, his Epistle is notable and remarkable concerning Christian conduct, emphasizing practical Christian perfection, that the believers should be "complete and entire, lacking in nothing." This may be considered the main subject of his Epistle. Such perfection in Christian behavior requires the trials of God's governmental dealing and the believers' endurance by the virtue of the divine birth through regeneration by the implanted word (vv. 18, 21).

What is the difference between complete and entire? As to help in answering this question, we may use a jigsaw puzzle as an illustration. For such a puzzle to be complete means that it contains all the pieces. If even one piece of the puzzle is missing, the puzzle would not be complete. Hence, to be complete means to have every part of a full unit. A person's body would not be complete if any part were missing. To be complete is to have all the parts or pieces of a certain unit.

But what does it mean to be entire? Using the illustration of the jigsaw puzzle, we may say that when all the pieces of the puzzle are put together, there is a whole, an entire entity. Suppose a jigsaw puzzle has a hundred pieces. If all the pieces are at hand, the puzzle is complete. Then when these pieces are put together in their proper places, the puzzle is whole or entire. Therefore, the word "entire" in 1:4 denotes the whole, the entirety, of a unit.

In 1:4 James is not using the words complete and entire as synonyms. What James means here is that we need to have all the items of practical Christian perfection. If we have every item, we shall be complete. Following that, we shall have the entire Christian perfection; that is, we shall have practical Christian perfection as a whole.

When James' writing touches the matter of practical Christian perfection, it is very descriptive and also detailed. On the one hand, this perfection must be complete, with every item present; on the other hand, it must be a whole, an entirety. Therefore, James ends verse 4 with the words "lacking in nothing." His desire was that those who received his Epistle would be complete and

entire in their practical Christian perfection, lacking in nothing.

ASKING GOD FOR WISDOM

In verse 5 James says, "But if anyone of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and does not reproach, and it will be given to him." It was by His wisdom that God, in Christ, made His eternal plan and carried it out (1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 3:9-11; Prov. 8:12, 22-31). And in His New Testament economy God first made Christ our wisdom (1 Cor. 1:24, 30). The wisdom of God is needed for practical Christian perfection. Hence, we need to ask God for it.

According to the composition of this Epistle, although it seems that James did not have a clear vision concerning God's New Testament economy, he had the wisdom to portray things concerning the practical Christian life.

James was reputed to be a man of prayer. Here he charged those who received his Epistle to pray for wisdom. This implies that his own wisdom was given by God through prayer. In this Epistle James emphasizes prayer (5:14-18). Prayer is a virtue of practical Christian perfection.

In verse 5 James tells us that if we lack wisdom, we should ask God for it. In order to be perfect in our behavior, the basic need is for wisdom. A foolish person cannot be perfect. But if we are full of wisdom, then in every activity of our daily life we shall behave perfectly. This indicates that perfection is mainly carried out through wisdom. A wise person can be perfect. However, if we lack wisdom, we may offend others by our foolish talk. Our speaking may indicate that we do not have adequate wisdom. When we are short of wisdom, we should ask God for it.

James says that if we ask God for wisdom, He will give generously and will not reproach. To give generously is to give with simplicity and liberality, without reserve (Rom. 12:8; 2 Cor. 8:2).

James' word here indicates that he is godly and that he knows God. In this verse James did not say, "If you lack

wisdom, you should learn of me. Let me give you some lectures or some books to read. Then you will have wisdom." Instead of speaking this way, James, being godly, encourages the readers of his Epistle to ask of God. He knows God and in particular knows that God is generous. James tells us in this verse that when God gives, He does not reproach. But a stingy person does not want to give anything. If he does give something, he may give with reproach, with stinging words. The generous God is not like such a man. God gives generously, and He gives without reproach. Being a godly man, a man who knew God, James realized this.

ASKING IN FAITH

In verse 6 James goes on to say, "But let him ask in faith, doubting nothing, for he who doubts is like a surge of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed." The Greek words rendered "doubting" and "doubts" also mean wavering and wavers. Someone who wavers in prayer is like a surge of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed.

A DOUBLE-SOULED PERSON

Verses 7 and 8 say, "For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord. He is a double-souled man, unstable in all his ways." God made man only one soul, with one mind and one will. When a believer doubts in prayer, he makes himself double-souled, like a boat with two rudders, unstable in direction. Faith in prayer is also a virtue of practical Christian perfection.

Verses 6 through 8 indicate that James surely was a godly man. No doubt, he was a man of wisdom, a man of faith, and a man of prayer. As such a man, he knew God.

GLORYING IN EXALTATION AND IN BEING BROUGHT LOW

In verses 9 and 10 James continues, "And let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, and the rich in his being brought low, because as a flower of the grass he will pass away." The Greek word rendered "glory" in verse 9 also means boast or rejoice. When a lowly brother glories and rejoices in exaltation, it leads him spontaneously to praise

the Lord (5:13). He should not glory in a secular way without praising the Lord. But although it is easy for a lowly brother to glory, rejoice, and praise the Lord in his exaltation, in his elevation or uplifted estate, it is not easy for a rich one to do so in being brought low. Nevertheless, whether in exaltation or in being brought low, to rejoice and praise is a virtue of practical Christian perfection.

We all need to realize that no matter how wealthy we may be, our environment may change. A person may be rich today, but after a short period of time he may be poor. For example, a brother may have a high position at work, and suddenly and unexpectedly he may be demoted or even fired. Because such things happen, we should not put our trust in our environment, wealth, position, or education.

In verse 11 James explains, "For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the grass, and its flower falls off, and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so also the rich shall fade away in his pursuits." What a sobering word to those who pursue riches! Yet it is a soothing word to the rich who are being brought low through loss of their riches.

James used the surge of the sea in verse 6 to illustrate a doubting heart, and the flower of the land in verse 10 to portray the fading rich man. Now, in verse 11 he uses the sun in the heavens with its scorching heat to illustrate the fading factor of man's riches under God's governmental dealing. He used even the turning of the planets in verse 17 to illustrate a variation which is in contrast to God the Father's invariableness. In dealing with the problem of our tongue in 3:3-12 he used twenty kinds of things for illustrations. Moreover, he used vapor in 4:14 to portray the brief appearing of our life, and the farmer's longsuffering in 5:7-8 to teach us how to await the Lord's coming. He was a wise and experienced man, with not only the experience of human life, but also wisdom from the divine source through seeking by prayer (v. 5; 3:13, 15, 17). Yet it seems that he may have been frustrated by his sympathy and compromise with Judaism, from seeing a thorough vision of the wisdom concerning God's New

Testament economy, as Paul saw and unveiled in his Epistles.

RECEIVING THE CROWN OF LIFE

In verse 12 James says, "Blessed is the man who endures trial, because having become approved, he will receive the crown of life, which He promised to those who love Him." Verses 2 through 12 deal with trials. Trials come from the believers' environment to prove their faith (vv. 2-3) through suffering (vv. 9-11). The believers should endure the trials with all joy (v. 2) because of their love for the Lord that they may receive the blessing of the crown of life. In verse 12 the word "approved" refers to the approving of the believers' faith (v. 3).

The crown of life is the glory, the expression, of life. The believers endure the trials by the divine life, and this will become their glory, their expression, the crown of life, as a reward to them at the Lord's appearing for their enjoyment in the coming kingdom (2:5).

The word "life" in verse 12 indicates that the underlying thought of verses 12 through 27 is the crucial need of the divine life. The begetting Father and His begetting us, His making us the firstfruit of His creatures (vv. 17-18, 27), the implanted word of life (v. 21), and the perfect law of life (v. 25) are all confirmations of this.

In verse 12 James says that the crown of life is promised to those who love the Lord. To believe in the Lord is to receive the divine life for our salvation; to love the Lord is to grow in the divine life for maturity that we may be qualified for a reward--the crown of life--to enjoy the glory of the divine life in the kingdom.

THE WAY TO ENDURE TRIALS

In verse 2 James says, "Count it all joy, my brothers, whenever you fall into various trials." Then, at the end of this section on enduring trials by faith, he says in verse 12, "Blessed is the man who endures trials." In verses 3 through 11 James points out the way to endure trials. If we would endure trials, we first need to ask God for wisdom. If we do not endure trials, this may mean that we are lacking wisdom, for a wise man always endures trials.

For example, suppose a brother who has been married only for a short period of time is offended by his wife. He then begins to consider the possibility of divorce. This is a foolish thought. If this brother were wise, he would never consider divorce. A wise person does not think like this. This brother needs wisdom in order to behave properly with his wife.

Without wisdom, our behavior as Christians cannot be perfect. In order to be perfect and, in particular, to endure trials, we need wisdom. If we would endure trials, the first thing we need to do is pray that the Lord would give us wisdom. Of course, this prayer must be in faith.

Second, if we would endure trials, we should not have any confidence in our environment, for it can change. Whether we are uplifted or brought low, our attitude toward the environment should be the same.

In order to endure trials, we must ask for wisdom, praying in faith. Then we need a genuine understanding of the vanity of human life. Whether we are rich or poor, high or low, human life is vain. If we realize this, we shall be able to endure trials and be blessed.

James says that the man who endures trials is blessed because, having become approved, he will receive the crown of life. This is a strong indication that James regards practical Christian perfection as coming out of the divine life which we receive at the time of our regeneration, our divine birth. The life that we have received through regeneration must now be developed into a crown. In what way is the divine life developed into a crown? It is developed by asking God for wisdom and also by understanding the vanity of human life. Therefore, we need wisdom, prayer, faith, and the realization of the vanity of human life. But the crucial matter is the divine life.

If we did not have the divine life, we would not be able to endure trials. Those saints who realize that they have the divine life within them and who exercise this life will

have the divine life developed into a crown. This crown is a glorious expression of the inner divine life received through our divine birth. This crown will be the reward which the Lord will give to those who love Him.

THE NEED FOR A CLEAR VISION OF GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

We have seen that James was a godly man, a man who knew God and loved the Lord. Furthermore, James was a man of wisdom, a man of prayer and faith, a man who understood the real situation of human life, and also a man who was able and willing to endure sufferings with joy. However, it is possible for even such a godly man to lack a clear vision concerning God's economy. Throughout the centuries, there have been a great many believers who were godly people like James. But one after another was lacking a clear vision concerning God's economy. There may be thousands of believers like this today. Some Christians may think that it is sufficient to be godly like James. They think it is adequate to know God, to love God, to be a man of prayer and faith, and to be able to endure trials with joy. But we would say that it is not adequate to be such a godly person, for even such a man as James may lack the proper view regarding God's move in the various dispensations.

The reason I appreciate the book of James is that this Epistle points out the possibility that we may be those who know God, who love God, and who are full of wisdom and faith, yet do not have a clear view of God's economy. We all need to know what the Lord's recovery is. The Lord's recovery is simply the recovery of God's economy.

Many believers are godly like James. They love God, they trust God, and they pray in faith. But they do not know anything about God's economy. These believers cannot satisfy God's desire. The desire of God's heart can be fulfilled only by those who know God and are godly and who, like Paul, also have a clear view concerning God's economy in this age.

We have pointed out that James uses many figures in

this Epistle: the surge of the sea, the flower of the land, the sun with its scorching heat, the planets, vapor, and a farmer's long suffering. James surely was a wise and experienced man. Not only did he have experience in human life, but through prayer he also obtained wisdom from the divine source. Nevertheless, it seems that, by his sympathy with Judaism and compromise with it, he was frustrated from seeing a thorough vision of God's New Testament economy.

James was the son of Mary, a woman who was pious and godly. Her praise recorded in chapter one of the Gospel of Luke indicates that she had the knowledge of God's Word, for in her praise she quoted a number of Old Testament verses. No doubt she gave her children, including James, a godly education. James, therefore, was raised in the atmosphere of Judaism. It is likely that James loved Judaism.

The fact that James was sympathetic to Judaism and compromised with it can be seen in chapter 21 of Acts. James and the other elders told Paul that there were thousands of Jewish believers who were zealous for the law. From reading this chapter we can see that with James and those in Jerusalem the spiritual sky was not clear. Rather, the sky was cloudy. In the case of James, the sky may have been clouded by his godliness. He was reputed along with John and Peter to be a pillar of the church, and no doubt he was the leading one. But although James was so highly regarded, with him there was mixture and vagueness concerning God's move. This mixture was also a cause for God's sending Titus, a prince of the Roman Empire, with the Roman army to destroy the city of Jerusalem, including the temple. If this had not happened, the mixture of Judaism with God's New Testament economy might have continued for centuries. God, however, would never sanction or justify such a mixture.

LIFE-STUDY OF JAMES

MESSAGE THREE

PRACTICAL VIRTUES OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

(3)

Scripture Reading: James 1:13-27

A BALANCED VIEW OF THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

After studying Paul's writings and all the Life-study Messages on these writings, we shall no doubt be influenced to receive the light concerning God's economy and to be strongly for it. But there is the possibility that we may be careless in our behavior or that we may neglect the matter of practical Christian perfection. Therefore, we need the balance provided by the book of James.

Luther said that the Epistle of James was an epistle of straw. In saying this, Luther was both unfair and wrong. We need to realize that after the revelation in Paul's writings concerning God's economy, God put in the book of James, one of the seven books of the New Testament that was not fully recognized until the council of Carthage in A.D. 397. Prior to that time, there was uncertainty whether this Epistle should be considered part of the holy Word. Eventually, the book of James was recognized as part of the Scriptures.

A Balancing Word

A striking characteristic of the Epistle of James is that it indicates that we may be very strong in God's economy, yet may not be complete and entire in our Christian behavior in our personal daily life. Many of us can testify that we have seen the vision concerning God's economy and that we are absolutely for this vision. However, we still need to pay attention to our behavior in our daily life.

A brother may easily become angry with his wife, or a sister may not have the proper attitude toward her husband. In such a case, both the brother and the sister are neither complete nor entire. This is an illustration of the fact that we need the balancing word found in the book of James.

A Strong Warning

In addition to providing balance, the Epistle of James also serves as a strong warning that it is possible to be very godly and yet not be clear concerning the vision of God's New Testament economy. According to church history, James was noted for living a godly life. One account says that James spent so much time kneeling in prayer that his knees became calloused. James certainly was a godly man, a man of prayer, and prayer is emphasized in his Epistle. Nevertheless, James may not have had a clear view concerning the distinction between grace and law; that is, he may not have had a clear view regarding God's economy. In his writings there are hints that this was the situation. However, his Epistle is notable and remarkable concerning Christian conduct and emphasizes practical Christian perfection. For this reason, in 1:4 James indicates that the believers should be "complete and entire, lacking in nothing."

It is only fair to point out that in the book of James we have both a balance and a warning. We need this book. Otherwise, there would be a gap, a lack, in the holy Word.

It is important that we do not have an unbalanced view of the Epistle of James. On the one hand, we need to see that this Epistle indicates that James may have lacked a clear view of God's economy. On the other hand, this book points out the need for practical Christian perfection. Of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, fourteen were written by Paul. The Epistles of Paul are concerned with God's economy, God's dispensation. This economy is vital and crucial. But in order to carry out God's economy, we need practical Christian perfection. This means that we should not be careless in our daily living. We may use a soldier in the army as an illustration. The main

responsibility of a soldier is to fight for his country. But in order to be a good fighter, a soldier needs to be proper in his personal daily life. Likewise, although we may be soldiers, fighters, for God's economy, we still need to be complete and entire in our daily Christian life.

The Position of James

The place of the book of James is indicated by its position in the arrangement of the books of the New Testament: it comes immediately after the fourteen Epistles of Paul. The Epistles of Paul from Romans to Hebrews all cover the major subject of God's economy. We may liken these Epistles to the main entrance to a building. We then may liken the Epistle of James to a little door near this entrance. Although the "entrance" of Paul's Epistles is crucial, we still need the "door" of the Epistle of James.

The Importance of Being Balanced in Our Christian Life

The book of James is a balance to those who are unbalanced in their Christian life. Perhaps in your Christian life you are wholly for God's economy. However, in your daily personal life you may be very short in the way you speak and handle matters. Concerning a number of things you may lack wisdom. Although you are a good soldier fighting for God's economy, in your daily life you may not be complete and entire. You may not trust in God very much, and you may not pray to Him concerning your needs. Because you are good in the major things but lacking in certain practical things, you need balance in your Christian life. The first thing the Epistle of James provides us with is this needed balance.

As we have indicated, the book of James also serves as a warning. James was outstanding in the matter of practical Christian perfection; he was a godly man who knew God, who loved God, and who prayed to God. But James was hindered by his godliness and veiled by his religion from seeing a thorough vision concerning God's New Testament economy.

In 1:27 James speaks of "pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father." As far as proper human behavior is concerned, we may need to be religious. We may be absolutely for God's economy, and yet we may be wrong in the way we speak to others or deal with them. Suppose a brother says, "Don't you know that I am utterly for God's economy? I have sacrificed everything for this. Day by day, I give my future to the Lord for His economy. Don't you appreciate this?" Yes, such a brother may be for God's economy, but he still needs practical Christian perfection in his daily life. Once again we see that we need to be balanced: we need a clear vision concerning God's economy, and we need practical Christian perfection.

We should be warned from the Epistle of James that we may be very godly, yet still lack a clear view concerning God's economy. Someone may be godly, humble, and meek in his daily life. But he may not be able to fight for God's economy. In order to fight for God's economy, we must learn the proper strategy. Paul was a person who was balanced. On the one hand, he was an excellent fighter; on the other hand, he was a godly person. Paul even encouraged Timothy, his younger co-worker, to exercise himself unto godliness (1 Tim. 4:7). In paying attention to the major things of God's economy, we should not neglect the practical details of our personal daily life.

The vast majority of today's Christians pay more attention to minor matters in their daily life than they do to the major matters of God's New Testament economy. In fact, many seeking Christians take care of very few of the things that are truly major. These Christians may be religious and godly, they may pray a great deal, they may have faith and endurance, and they may love God. In their Christian life they are imitators of James. But they have not seen God's economy.

Because it is possible for us to be this kind of Christian, we need the warning that we may be godly and yet not see God's economy. We may be complete and entire concerning

Christian conduct, but we may not know how to fight the battle to carry out God's economy. Therefore, I am burdened to emphasize the importance of being balanced in our Christian life. We need to see God's economy, and we need to be perfected in our daily personal life so that we may be complete and entire. We need both the balance and the warning found in the book of James. Regarding this book, we need to be fair, recognizing that the "entrance" of Paul's Epistles still needs the help of the "door" of the book of James.

RESISTING TEMPTATION BY THE DIVINE LIFE

In 1:2-12 we considered the first item of the practical virtues of Christian perfection covered in this book--enduring trials by faith. In 1:13-18 we come to a second item--resisting temptation as God-born ones.

In verses 13 through 18 the first matter is resisting temptation, and the second is God's bringing us forth through regeneration. God has caused us to have a new birth. Through any kind of birth, life is always imparted. When God regenerated us, causing us to have a divine birth, the divine life was imparted to us. In these verses there is the implication that we resist temptation by the divine life we received in our divine birth. Therefore, the title of this section is "Resisting Temptation as God-born Ones."

Because we have been born of God, we are now the children of God possessing God's life. This divine life is the means, the "capital," for us to resist temptation. The divine life has been deposited into us, and thus we have the ability, energy, strength, and power to resist temptation.

TEMPTED BY LUST

James 1:13 says, "Let no one say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted of evil, and He Himself tempts no one." The Greek word for "tempted" here also means tried, tested. The Greek word for trials or trial in verses 2 and 12 is *peirasmos*, and for tempted is *peiraso*. The two words are very close, both meaning to try,

to test, to prove. To be tried, tested, proved, by outward environmental suffering is a trial (v. 2). To be tried, tested, proved, by inward lustful enticing is a temptation (v. 14). The trial is dealt with in verses 2 through 12; the temptation is dealt with in verses 13 through 21. As for the trial, we should endure it by loving the Lord to obtain the blessing--the crown of life. As for temptation, we should resist it by receiving the implanted word to obtain salvation, the salvation of our soul (v. 21).

In verse 13 James says that God cannot be tempted of evil and that He Himself tempts no one. Here "tempted" in Greek is *apeirastos*, untried, hence, not temptable, not to be tempted, incapable of being tempted. The Greek word for "tempt" here is *peirazo*. The Devil, not God, is the tempter (Matt. 4:3; 1 Thes. 3:5).

In verses 14 and 15 James continues, "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own lust; then the lust, having conceived, gives birth to sin; and the sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death." The tempter, the Devil, is the begetting father of sin (1 John 3:8, 10), who has the might of death (Heb. 2:14) through sin (1 Cor. 15:56). He injected sin into Adam, through which death passed to all men (Rom. 5:12).

TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS

In our Christian life we are tried by two categories of things. The first category is positive, and the second category is negative. The first category includes trials and sufferings that test and prove us. Persecution, suffering, and a poor environment try us, test us, and prove where we stand before God. The second category, which is negative, includes temptation. For example, your colleagues at work may be used by Satan to tempt you to engage in a certain form of worldly activity. You may also be tempted in many other ways. Perhaps a neighbor has bought a new car. When you see that car, you desire to have one like it. This is a temptation.

Like trials, temptations also test us and prove us. To be

tested by outward environmental suffering is a trial, but to be tested by the enticing of inward lust is a temptation. The invitation to engage in worldly activities or the sight of someone's new car may stir the lust within us. This is not a trial; it is a temptation. We need to endure trials, but we need to resist temptation. In order to endure trials, we need wisdom. However, wisdom is not sufficient for us to resist temptation. In order to resist temptation, we need the divine life.

In our Christian life temptations are more frequent than trials. We may have trials periodically, but we may have temptations daily, even hourly. Sometimes temptations come one after another. For instance, at school a young person may be tempted when he sees a classmate with a special kind of pen. Immediately, he is tempted and desires to have a pen like that one.

The reason something like a pen can become a temptation to us is that we have the "germs" of lust within us. If we did not have these germs in us, nothing could be a temptation to us. It is the lust in us that causes so many things to be temptations to us. What we need to resist is not actually the thing that tempts us, but the lust within us. As we have pointed out, wisdom is not sufficient for this. We may have wisdom, yet not have the power to resist lust. If we would resist the lust in us, we need another life, the life of God.

REBORN THROUGH THE WORD OF TRUTH

As we shall see, verse 18 says that our Father has brought us forth, regenerated us, by the word of truth, which is the word of divine reality. When we heard the gospel, we heard the word of God's reality. When we received this word, we were reborn. Through the divine birth the divine life was imparted into our being. Now we not only possess the divine life, but we are enjoying this life with its divine nature. This life is the strength, the inner power, by which we can resist the germs of lust that are within us.

THE FATHER OF THE LIGHTS

In verses 16 and 17 James goes on to say, "Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. All good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the lights, with whom is no variableness or shadow cast by turning." In this verse giving refers to the act of giving, and the gift refers to the thing given. The lights here refer to the heavenly luminaries. The Father is the Creator, the source, of these shining bodies. With Him there is no shadow cast by turning, as there is with the heavenly orbs in the moon turning its dark side to us, or in the sun being eclipsed by the moon, for He is not variable, not changeable. As such, He is incapable of being tempted of evil, nor does He tempt anyone.

According to verse 17, both the giving and the gift are from above, coming down from the Father of the lights. Years ago, I thought that the lights in verse 17 were spiritual lights and that here James was saying that God is the Father of these spiritual lights. But in recent years I found out that these are not spiritual lights; rather, they are heavenly bodies, such as the sun, the moon, the planets, and the stars.

How can God be called the Father of these heavenly bodies? He is called the Father of these lights because they were created by Him. According to Acts 17, everything created by God has been produced by Him. In this sense, He is the Father of whatever He has produced. Because the heavenly bodies were created by God, He is the Father of the lights, luminaries.

James says that with the Father of lights there is no variableness, no variation, or shadow cast by turning. Years ago, I understood this to mean that because God never turns, never changes, there is no shadow of darkness. However, even when I held this understanding there was a doubt within whether this was the real meaning here. Is James saying that because God never changes, with Him there is no darkness? Eventually, I learned that in this verse James is referring to the move of the heavenly bodies, such as that of the planets in their orbits or rotation. Such movements may cause darkness,

as during an eclipse of the sun. But God does not change. With Him there is no variableness as there is with the heavenly orbs.

Now we can understand that James refers to the orbs in the solar system to show us that the Father, the One who has begotten us, is stable. With Him there is no turning. Therefore, we should not say that we are tempted by God. Because God is stable, He does not tempt anyone, and He cannot be tempted. Based upon the realization of God's stability, James emphasizes the fact that our begetting Father never tempts us. On the contrary, whenever we are tempted, we are tempted by our lust. Then lust, having conceived, gives birth to sin. Sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death. Lust is the factor of temptation that produces sin, and sin brings in death.

A FIRSTFRUIT OF HIS CREATURES

In verse 8 James says of God the Father, "Having purposed, He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a certain firstfruit of His creatures." The fact that God purposed means that He brought us forth of His own will, by His intention, to carry out His purpose by begetting us that we might be the firstfruit of His creatures.

Sin, the source of darkness, brings forth death. But the Father of lights brought us forth to be the firstfruit of His creatures, full of the vigorous life that matures first. This refers to the divine birth, our regeneration (John 3:5-6), which is carried out according to God's eternal purpose.

According to verse 18, God brought us forth by the word of truth. The word of truth is the word of the divine reality, the word of what the Triune God is (John 1:14, 17). This word is the seed of life, by which we have been regenerated (1 Pet. 1:23).

James says that God has brought us forth by the word of truth so that we should be a certain firstfruit of His creatures. God will renew His entire creation to have a new heaven and new earth with the New Jerusalem as the center (Rev. 21:1-2). He first regenerated us to be the firstfruit of His new creation by imparting His divine life

into our being through the implanted word of life, that we might live a life of perfection. This should be the seed of practical Christian perfection. This life will consummate in the New Jerusalem as the living center of God's eternal new universe.

LIFE-STUDY OF JAMES

MESSAGE FOUR

PRACTICAL VIRTUES OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

(4)

Scripture Reading: James 1:19-27

QUICK TO HEAR, SLOW TO SPEAK, SLOW TO WRATH

In this message we shall consider 1:19-27. In verse 19 James says, "You know this, my beloved brothers; but let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." The Greek words rendered "you know this" may also be translated "know this." Hearing tempts us to speak, and speaking is the fire that kindles wrath (see 3:6). If we bridle our speaking (1:26), we quench our wrath. James' word here, for the strengthening of his view of practical Christian perfection, resembles the tone of the Old Testament proverbs (Prov. 10:19; 14:17).

In verse 20 James continues, "For the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God." The righteousness of God does not need the help of man's wrath. The wrath of man is useless in performing the righteousness of God.

RECEIVING WITH MEEKNESS THE IMPLANTED WORD

In verse 21 James goes on to say, "Wherefore, putting away all filthiness and abundance of malice, receive in meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." Here the word of God is likened to a plant of life planted into our being and growing in us to bring forth fruit for the salvation of our souls. We need to receive the word of God in meekness, in all submission, without any resistance.

According to the context of this chapter, the salvation

of our souls implies the endurance of environmental trials (vv. 2-12) and the resisting of lustful temptation (vv. 13-21). James' view concerning the salvation of our souls is somewhat negative, definitely not as positive as that of Paul, who says our soul can be transformed by the renewing Spirit even to the image of the Lord from glory to glory (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23; 2 Cor. 3:18).

We should appreciate James for saying that we need to receive in meekness the implanted word, which is able to save our souls. In his writings Paul did not use the expression "implanted word." This expression indicates that the word is of life. Here James likens the word to a living plant that is planted into the soil of our heart. In this way, the word becomes the implanted word. After the word of God has been planted into the soil of our heart, it will grow and have the power to save our soul.

In verse 21 we are told to receive the implanted word with meekness. In this verse meekness does not mean gentleness; here meekness means submissiveness, without resistance. To receive the word with meekness is not to reject it, but to be submissive to the word. We should receive God's word implanted into our being with full submissiveness. Whatever God's word says, we should receive by saying, "Amen." As the hymn says, we should "Amen the Word of God" (*Hymns*, #1218).

If we receive the implanted word with meekness, with submissiveness, this means we are absolutely open to God's word. We are like land that is opened to receive seed from the farmer and rain from the sky. God plants, or sows, His word into our heart, and we should receive His word with meekness. This is to receive in meekness the implanted word. Because this word is living, after it has been implanted into our heart, it will grow. Moreover, as the word grows, it will save our soul.

THE IMPLANTED WORD ABLE TO SAVE OUR SOUL

In 1:14 and 15 James says, "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own lust; then the lust, having conceived, gives birth to sin; and the sin,

when it is fully grown, brings forth death." Here we see that temptation is related to lust. Furthermore, lust has much to do with the soul. The saving of the soul involves both the enduring of trials and the resisting of temptations.

Persecution, trial, and temptation for the most part affect our soul. For example, suppose a brother's new car is stolen, and he is sad because of this; he is suffering in his soul. Likewise, if a brother loses his job, he will also suffer in his soul. Most sufferings affect the soul. How can we withstand these sufferings? As we have pointed out, the power to withstand suffering is through the divine life that is within us. As God-born ones, we resist temptation also by the divine life.

NOURISHED THROUGH THE WORD

If we would resist temptation, we need to be nourished through receiving the implanted word. We may use eating food as an illustration. Although we may be physically healthy, we still need to eat nourishing meals every day. Although we have physical life, we still need daily nourishment. If I did not eat breakfast in the morning, I would not have the strength to work. The principle is the same with the divine life. Through regeneration God has imparted His life into us. But this life still requires nourishment, and the nourishment we need is the implanted word. Every day we need to come to the Bible to receive God's word. In our spiritual life we need a good "breakfast" every day. When we eat our spiritual breakfast, we receive the implanted word. As God plants His word into us every morning, this word becomes nourishment to our inward man, and it strengthens our spirit. Once our spirit has been strengthened, it will sustain our soul. As a result, our soul will have the strength to withstand suffering and to resist temptation. This means that through the nourishment of the implanted word we experience the salvation of our soul.

If our soul is not strengthened in this way it will not be able to withstand trials and temptations. For instance if a

brother is not nourished through the implanted word, his soul will not be able to withstand the loss of a job or of a sum of money. Such a loss will always affect our soul. Satan uses such sufferings to put us down. How, then, can our soul be sustained in the midst of such suffering? Our soul can only be sustained by a spirit that has been nourished through the implanted word. Realizing this, Paul prayed that the saints would be strengthened into the inner man (Eph. 3:16). Our soul needs to be strengthened in the inner man, and the inner man is the spirit. But how can the spirit be strengthened? The spirit is strengthened by being nourished with the implanted word of God.

Many of us can testify that our spirit has been strengthened by God's implanted word. If we spend some time in the morning to take the Word of God into us, our spirit will be strengthened. Because our spirit is strengthened, it will sustain our soul. Then our soul, being sustained in this way, will be able to withstand trials and resist temptations.

We know from experience that if our spirit is not strengthened and our soul is not sustained by a strong spirit, we are easily defeated by trials or temptations. The result is failure. This means that although we have been saved in our spirit, we are not being saved daily in our soul. Rather, day by day there is a loss to our soul; we even lose our soul. Do you know why we lose our soul? We lose our soul because it does not receive sustenance from our spirit. If our spirit is "flat," lacking heavenly air, it will not be able to sustain our soul. Hence, we need the implanted word to "pump up" our spirit. If our spirit is filled with divine air, it will be strong and able to sustain our soul. As a result, our soul will be saved.

Day by day we need to receive in meekness the implanted word, which is able to save our soul. The implanted word is full of energy to save our soul. This word in 1:21 certainly is an excellent point in James' writing.

Every day our soul is tested by outward environmental sufferings and by inward enticing lusts. For this reason,

our soul needs to be saved. As we have pointed out, in

order for our soul to be saved, it needs to be sustained through our daily feeding on the implanted word. This requires that we receive the word of God just as we receive our daily food. If a child refuses to eat, he will become weak and unhealthy. If a child refuses to eat nourishing food, he is not submissive or meek in the matter of eating. Every child needs to receive in meekness the food served by his mother. If he eats healthy food in this way, he will be strong and healthy. In like manner, we need to receive in meekness the implanted word.

THE PERFECT LAW

In 1:25 James speaks of the perfect law, the law of freedom: "But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of freedom, and continues in it, not having become a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word, this one will be blessed in his doing." The perfect law, the law of freedom (or liberty), is not the law of letters written on tablets of stone outside of us, but the law of life inscribed on our hearts (Heb. 8:10), the moral standard of which corresponds to that of the kingdom's constitution decreed by the Lord on the mount (Matt. 5--7). Since the law of letters was unable to give man life (Gal. 3:21), but only able to expose man's weakness and failure and keep him in slavery (Gal. 5:1), it was a law of bondage. Since the perfect law of life is the function of the divine life which was imparted into our being at regeneration, and supplies us throughout our Christian life with the unsearchable riches of the divine life to free us from the law of sin and death and fulfill all the righteous requirements of the law of letters (Rom. 8:2, 4), it is the law of freedom. It is the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:21), even Christ Himself, living within us to regulate us by imparting the divine nature into our being that we may live a life to express God's image. James may have considered this law to be the basic rule of the Christian life for practical Christian perfection.

The New Testament and the Law of Life

Concerning the perfect law, the law of freedom, one

interpretation is that the perfect law refers to the entire New Testament. Our notes say that the perfect law, the law of freedom, is the law of life within us. Actually, these two interpretations are one. By using the old Testament law as an illustration, we can point out how this is so. When we speak of the law of Moses, we usually have in mind the Ten Commandments. However, often the entire Old Testament is called the law and the prophets (Matt. 7:12; 22:40). In ancient times, the Jews regarded the Old Testament as consisting of two parts--the law and the prophets. The "prophets," of course, comprised all the books of the prophets. Then the remainder of the Old Testament, including the Psalms, was considered the "law." In a similar way, we may say that the entire New Testament is a new law to us. The Old Testament law was written on tablets of stone. It was not written within the people. But the New Testament is written on our hearts (Heb. 8:10). First, God has written the perfect law, the law of freedom, in the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Second, when He begot us through regeneration, He wrote this law into our being. Now we have within us a law of life that corresponds to the entire New Testament. Therefore, the two interpretations of the perfect law--that it refers to the New Testament and that it refers to the law of life--are one. On the one hand, the perfect law is the entire New Testament; on the other hand, it is the law of life inscribed into our being.

The words "look into" indicate that the perfect law is something that can be read. This indicates that the perfect law refers to the New Testament and not only to the law of life in our being. The law of life can be sensed, but it is not readable. The fact that the perfect law is readable indicates that it denotes not only the law of life but also the entire New Testament.

The principle of the New Testament law has been written into our inner being and has become the law of life within us. The difference between the old law and the new law is that the old law was written only on tablets, whereas the new law was written both in ink and within

our being. As we have pointed out, this new law has become the law of life within us, and this law corresponds to the entire New Testament. This is the perfect law, the law of freedom.

The Law of Freedom

Although the law of the New Testament is shorter than the law of the Old Testament, the new law is perfect, whereas the old law is not perfect. Furthermore, the new law is the law of freedom, but the old law is the law of bondage. The law of the Old Testament was the law of bondage because it did not have the ability to impart life. That law could make requirements and condemn. Because it brought people into the bondage of slavery, it was the law of bondage. But the New Testament law gives life; it imparts life into our being. The life imparted into us through the New Testament law delivers us from the law sin and of death. Therefore, this law, the perfect law, is the law of freedom.

PURE RELIGION

In verse 26 James goes on to say, "If anyone thinks himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue, but deceiving his own heart, this one's religion is vain." Here the Greek word rendered "religious" is *threskos*, an adjective; *threskeia*, the noun for religion, means ceremonial service and worship to God, implying the fear of God. The adjective is used only here in the New Testament. The noun is used here and in verse 27 in a positive sense, in Colossians 2:18 (for worship) in a negative sense, and in Acts 26:5 in a general sense.

James' writing concerning God's New Testament economy is not as striking as Paul's, Peter's, or John's. Paul focuses on Christ living and being formed in us (Gal. 2:20; 4:19) and Christ magnified in us and lived out of us (Phil. 1:20-21), that we as the church, His Body, may become His fullness, His expression (Eph. 1:22-23). Peter stresses the fact that God has regenerated us through the resurrection of Christ (1 Pet. 1:3), making us partakers of

His divine nature, that we may live a life of godliness (2 Pet. 1:3-7) and be built up a spiritual house to express His virtues (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). John emphasizes the eternal life given to us for our fellowship with the Triune God (1 John 1:2-3) and the divine birth that brings into us the divine life as the divine seed for us to live a life like God (1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:17) and be the church, as a lampstand, bearing the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 1:9, 11-12), which will consummate in the New Jerusalem to express God for eternity (Rev. 21:2-3, 10-11). James stresses, as New Testament characteristics, only God's begetting of us (James 1:18), the perfect law of freedom (1:25), the indwelling Spirit (4:5), and a little bit of the church (5:14), without speaking of Christ as our life and the church as the expression of Christ, the two most outstanding and dispensational characteristics of the New Testament. According to his Epistle, James must have been very religious. It might have been due to this and his practical Christian perfection that he was reputed along with Peter and John to be a pillar, even the first, in the church at Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9). However, he was not strong in the revelation of God's New Testament economy in Christ, but was still under the influence of the background of the old Judaic religion--to worship God with ceremonies and live a life in the fear of God. This is proved by the words in Acts 21:20-24 and in this Epistle, 2:2-11.

In 1:26 James says of the one who does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, that his religion is vain. Not bridling the tongue is to speak quickly (v. 19) and loosely without restriction. This always deceives the speaking one's own heart, deceiving his conscience, the consciousness of his heart.

In verse 27 James says, "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, to keep oneself unspotted from the world." This word of James, for the strengthening of his view of practical Christian perfection, implies an element of the Old Testament charges (Deut. 14:29; 24:19-21 12-13).

To keep oneself unspotted from the world is not to be worldly, not to be stained by worldliness. This word about keeping oneself unspotted from the world is also a part of James' God-fearing view of practical Christian perfection. To visit orphans and widows is to act according to God's loving heart, a positive characteristic of the perfection; and to keep oneself unspotted from the world is to be separated from the world according to God's holy nature, a negative characteristic of the perfection.

THREE MAJOR POINTS

In chapter one of the Epistle of James three major points are covered: the divine birth (v. 18), receiving the implanted word (v. 21), and the perfect law of freedom (v. 25). First God brought us forth, regenerated us, by the word of truth. Hence, the word of truth is the seed of life for our divine birth. After being regenerated by receiving this seed, we need to continue to receive the implanted word, which is able to save our soul in our daily life. According to verse 18, the word of truth is for regeneration in our spirit. According to verse 21, we need the implanted word for the daily salvation of our soul. Moreover, according to verses 25 through 27, we need the perfect law of freedom so that we may live a God-fearing life, a life that might be considered religious in a proper sense. Such a life corresponds to God's heart, which is love, and to God's nature, which is holiness.

Negatively, chapter one of James deals with enduring trials and resisting temptations. Actually, the intrinsic contents of this chapter comprise three aspects of the divine word: the word of truth for regeneration, the implanted word for the salvation of the soul, and the entire New Testament as God's word to be the law of freedom. We have seen that the law of freedom refers to the law of life, which has been planted into our being as a principle. This inner law helps us to live a life of love and holiness, a life that is according to God's heart and nature.

I want to emphasize the fact that each of the three major points covered in James 1 is related to the divine

word: first, the word in the aspect of truth for regeneration; second, the word in the aspect of implantation for the daily salvation of the soul; and third, the word referring to the entire New Testament as the new law, the law that has been wrought into our being to become an inner principle by which we live a godly life according to God's loving heart and holy nature.

LIFE-STUDY OF JAMES

MESSAGE FIVE

PRACTICAL VIRTUES OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

(5)

Scripture Reading: James 1:18, 21, 25-27; Acts 21:17-26

We have pointed out that we need to have a balanced view of the Epistle of James. On the one hand, this Epistle is helpful in emphasizing practical Christian perfection. On the other hand, this Epistle serves as a warning that it is possible even for a very godly man not to be clear concerning God's New Testament economy.

WHAT JAMES SAYS CONCERNING GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

In 1:26 and 27 James says, "If anyone thinks himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue, but deceiving his own heart, this one's religion is vain. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, to keep oneself unspotted from the world." These verses, in which James speaks of religion, indicate that James' writing concerning God's New Testament economy is not as striking as that of Paul, Peter, or John. Paul focuses on Christ living and being formed in us (Gal. 2:20; 4:19) and Christ being magnified in us and lived out of us (Phil. 1:20-21), that we as the church, His Body, may become His fullness, His expression (Eph. 1:22-23). Peter stresses the fact that God has regenerated us through the resurrection of Christ (1 Pet. 1:3), making us partakers of His divine nature, so that we may live a life of godliness (2 Pet. 1:3-7) and be built up a spiritual house to express His virtues (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). John emphasizes the eternal life given to us for our fellowship with the Triune

God (1 John 1:2-3), and the divine birth that brings into us the divine life as the divine seed for us to live a life like God (1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:17) and be the church, as a lampstand, bearing the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 1:9, 11-12), which will consummate in the New Jerusalem to express God for eternity (Rev. 21:2-3, 10-11). I hope that all the saints, especially the young people, will study this summary of the writings of Paul, Peter, and John regarding God's New Testament economy and thoroughly get into each point.

What does James say in his Epistle concerning God's New Testament economy? James emphasizes, as New Testament characteristics, only God's begetting of us (1:18), the perfect law of freedom (1:25), the indwelling Spirit (4:5), and a little regarding the church (5:14). However, he mentions these things without speaking of Christ as our life and the church as the expression of Christ, the two most outstanding and dispensational characteristics of the New Testament. To point out these matters concerning the Epistle of James is to have a fair and balanced view.

PURE RELIGION

According to his Epistle, James must have been very religious. In 1:27 he uses the word "religion" in a positive sense when he speaks concerning "pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father." James goes on to say that this pure religion is to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. To visit orphans and widows in their affliction is to act according to the loving heart of God, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world is to behave according to the holy nature of God. No doubt, this is a very good religion, even the best religion, a religion according to the heart and nature of God. Nevertheless, although James could write such a word about pure religion, he did not have a clear vision concerning God's New Testament economy. This is a matter that needs to be emphasized again and again.

THE NEED FOR BALANCE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

In our Christian life we need to have a balance between practical Christian perfection and God's New Testament economy. The fact that the human body has two shoulders, two arms, two hands, two legs, and two feet indicates that there is balance in God's creation. We should not be unbalanced Christians. We need to be balanced with God's economy and our practical Christian perfection. In what I have written concerning the Epistle of James I have endeavored to be balanced, pointing out, on the positive side, that in the Epistle of James we have practical Christian perfection and, on the negative side, a warning that a godly person may not have a clear vision of God's New Testament economy.

It may have been due to James' religion and his practical Christian perfection that he was reputed along with Peter and John to be a pillar, even the first, in the church at Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9). However, he was not strong in the revelation of God's New Testament economy in Christ. Rather, he was still under the influence of the background of the old Judaic religion--to worship God with ceremonies and live a life in the fear of God. This is proved by what he says in 2:2-11 and by his words in Acts 21:20-24.

THE SITUATION IN CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE OF ACTS

Let us now consider the situation in Acts 21. Verse 18 says, "And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present." After Paul had greeted them, "he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry" (v. 19). When they heard this report, "they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law." The Greek word rendered "thousands" actually means myriads, tens of thousands. This verse indicates that James, who took the lead to tell Paul about the

thousands of Jews who believed and yet were zealous of the law, believed in the Lord Jesus, but he still preached and taught the law of Moses. Although he had been saved through grace, he still kept the law. What do we have here in Acts 21--the dispensation of law or the dispensation of grace? In this chapter we have a mixture. God would not tolerate this mixture of the dispensation of law with the dispensation of grace.

In weighing James we need to use a heavenly scale, a scale that has James' writings concerning practical Christian perfection on one side and his word in Acts 21 on the other side. Only when we have both sides can we have a balanced view of James. For example, if we had only chapter one of James but not chapter twenty-one of Acts, our estimation of James might be too high. But if we also have Acts 21, our view will be more balanced.

I have consulted some good books on the Epistle of James. But in the comments on James, none of these books refers to Acts 21. Therefore, I wish to emphasize the fact that if we would have a balanced view of James, we need to consider his Epistle against the background of Acts 21. When we read this chapter, we can understand why James addressed his Epistle to the twelve tribes and also why in chapter two he uses the term "synagogue." The fact that James speaks of the twelve tribes and the synagogue indicates that he had mixed the things of Judaism with the matters of the Christian life according to God's New Testament economy. James' own word points to such a mixture.

In Acts 21 James advised, even urged, Paul to go to the temple with those who had a vow on them: "Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law" (vv. 23-24). By that time Paul had already written the books of Romans and Galatians, books in which he says that the

law had been annulled. Nevertheless, he acted according to James' suggestion.

Paul had come to Jerusalem, where the first church had been established. According to Acts 21, he was meeting with James, who was a pillar of the church, and with all the elders. No doubt, Peter and John were present. Paul gave a testimony of how God had used him to work among the Gentiles, and they all glorified the Lord for this. Then they went on to point out that in Jerusalem there were myriads of believers who were zealous for the law. It is difficult to believe that James, a man reputed to be so godly, could say such a word to the Apostle Paul and that he would urge him to prove to the Jews that he continued to keep the law. James told Paul that the Jews who were zealous of the law "are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs" (v. 21). To walk after the customs is to walk according to the ordinances. Then James went on to ask Paul to go with the four men who had a vow upon them and to purify himself with them. Probably the vow they had taken was the vow of a Nazarite. Now they were required to shave their heads and to offer sacrifices daily for a period of seven days.

When I first read this portion of the Word years ago, I found it hard to believe that Paul took James' advice. Nevertheless, he followed James' word and went to the temple with the others and participated in the vow. It seems that Paul could not avoid being influenced by that environment with its mixture.

A POSSIBLE REASON FOR PAUL'S BEHAVIOR

Paul, however, may have had ground for his behavior. If he had been asked about this, he could have referred to his word to the Corinthians: "And to the Jews I became as a Jew, in order that I might gain Jews; to those under law, as under law (not being myself under law), that I might gain those under law; to those without law, as without law (not being without the law of God but within the law of

Christ), that I might gain those without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak. To all men I have become all things, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:20-22). Furthermore, Paul could have said, "When I wrote the books of Romans and Galatians, I was with Gentiles, so I behaved as a Gentile. But now in Jerusalem I am with Jews, and I behave as a Jew." But whatever the case may have been, Paul took the advice of James and joined himself to those who had the vow upon them.

In Acts 21:26-28 we see that when the seven days were nearly over, certain Jews saw Paul in the temple, stirred up the people, and laid hands on him. This may indicate that the Lord did not agree with what Paul was doing and allowed him to be arrested. Eventually, Paul was sent to Rome to be judged directly by Caesar Nero. Although Paul was such a strong apostle, he was still human, and he took the advice of those Judaic elders in Jerusalem. God, however, would not tolerate the situation.

A MIXTURE OF THE NEW AND THE OLD

We have a strong basis in the Bible for saying that James was not strong in the revelation of God's New Testament economy in Christ. Actually, James was somewhat off from God's economy. As we have pointed out, he was still under the influence of the background of the old Judaic religion. His word in Acts 21 definitely and clearly indicates this.

We may say that James' view was obscure concerning the distinction between God's new economy and His old dispensation. This obscurity may have been due to the strong tradition James was in and to the background he was under. This tradition and background worked together with James' sympathy with Judaism to cause him to sacrifice God's new economy and compromise with the old dispensation. This compromise produced a mixture that was intolerable to God.

The divine principle is always to keep God's dispensations distinct and separate. In Acts 21 even Paul

became somewhat involved in this mixture because of the atmosphere, the cloudy sky, in Jerusalem. Man's sympathy with tradition and background always brings in a mixture of the new with the old. It is a shame that a God-fearing man like James would have taken part in such a mixture. This is recorded in the Scriptures, and it is certainly fair to call our attention to it so that we may realize the need to have a clear vision concerning God's New Testament economy.

LIFE-STUDY OF JAMES

MESSAGE SIX

PRACTICAL VIRTUES OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

(6)

Scripture Reading: James 2:1-26

In this message we shall consider chapter two of the Epistle of James.

NO RESPECT OF PERSONS

Verse 1 says, "My brothers, do not have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory with respect of persons." This verse indicates that this Epistle, especially this chapter, was written to the New Testament believers in the Lord Jesus Christ of glory. Here James tells us not to have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory with respect of persons. This certainly is a virtue of Christian perfection. If we have the faith of the glorious Lord, we should not have respect of persons.

THE RICH AND THE POOR IN THE SYNAGOGUE

In verse 2 James continues, "And if there comes into your synagogue a man with gold rings in splendid clothing, and there also comes in a poor man in filthy clothing." Here "synagogue" is the anglicized form of the Greek word *synagoge*, composed of *sun*, together, and *ago*, to bring; hence, a collecting, gathering, congregation, assembly; by transition, the place of gathering. It was used in the New Testament to denote the congregation (Acts 13:43; 9:2; Luke 12:11) and the congregating place (Luke 7:5) of the Jews, where they sought the knowledge of God by studying the Holy Scriptures (Luke 4:16-17; Acts 13:14-15). In Jerusalem there were quite a few synagogues of various kinds of Jews (Acts 6:9). This word, used here by

James, may indicate that the Jewish believers considered their assembly and assembling place as also one of the synagogues among the Jews. If so, this bears, as the whole Epistle does, a Jewish character, and may indicate that the Jewish Christians regarded themselves as still a part of the Jewish nation, as the chosen people of God according to the Old Testament, and that they lacked a clear vision concerning the distinction between God's chosen people of the Old Testament and the believers in Christ of the New Testament.

We see once again that although James was a very godly man, he did not have a clear vision concerning God's New Testament economy. I am concerned that in the years to come certain saints may think that it is good enough to be like James, godly and perfect in character and behavior. As we have pointed out, we need to be balanced in our Christian life; that is, we need to care for God's New Testament economy and also have in our daily living the necessary practical Christian perfection. We have seen from this Epistle that, on the one hand, James indicates that we need practical Christian perfection and that, on the other hand, this Epistle serves as a warning that even a godly man may not have a clear vision of God's economy. This was the reason in the foregoing message we considered James' word in Acts 21. The mixture in Jerusalem between the old and new dispensations was a cause for God's allowing the Roman army to destroy the city. Nothing is more offensive to God than opposing His economy. Of course, if we have poor character, that will be offensive to Him. But poor character is not as serious a matter as being opposed to God's economy.

Concerning a rich man and a poor man who may come into the synagogue, James asked the recipients of his Epistle, "And you look upon the one wearing the splendid clothing and say, You sit here in a good place; and to the poor man you say, You stand there, or sit under my footstool; have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil reasonings?" (vv. 3-4). Any distinctions that existed between the rich and

the poor among the Christian brothers were a shame to the Lord and to the salvation of His divine life.

A poor brother reading these verses may commend James. However, one with a clear vision concerning the distinction between God's economy in the Old Testament and in the New might say, "James, you are clear that there should be no distinction between rich and poor, but you are not as clear that there is a distinction between the two dispensations."

HEIRS OF THE KINGDOM

In verse 5 James goes on to say, "Listen, my beloved brothers: Has not God chosen the poor in the world, to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which He promised to those who love Him?" The kingdom of God here is also the kingdom of Christ, which will be inherited by the overcoming believers in the coming age (Eph. 5:5; Gal. 5:21; 1 Cor. 6:10; Rev. 20:4, 6). The reality of this kingdom should not be practiced in the Jewish synagogue, but in the Christian church, which is the Body of Christ (Rom. 14:17).

In verse 5 James speaks the second time about loving God (see 1:12). We believe in the Lord for our salvation (Acts 16:31); we love God (1 John 2:5, 15) for our overcoming so that we may receive the promised kingdom as a reward.

We cannot receive the kingdom simply by believing. According to the Gospel of Matthew, the kingdom will be a reward. Receiving this reward requires that we love God. In order to receive salvation, it is adequate that we believe in the Lord. But if we would receive the reward of the kingdom, we need to love God.

In 2:2 James speaks about the synagogue, and in 2:5, about the kingdom. This indicates that he puts these two matters together. What a serious mistake! This is a further indication that James was lacking with respect to God's economy. It is not possible to practice the reality of the kingdom in a Jewish synagogue. This can be practiced only in the church life.

OPPRESSED BY THE RICH

In verses 6 and 7 James says, "But you have dishonored the poor. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you to the courts? Do they not blaspheme the honorable name by which you are called?" The Greek word rendered "courts" may also be translated "tribunals." James' word in verse 6 is also a mixture. I do not believe that the rich brothers in Christ dragged the poor brothers to the law courts. Rather, I believe that James is referring here to wealthy, unbelieving Jews, who took certain brothers to court. According to verse 7, these rich ones blasphemed the honorable name by which the believers are called. Literally, "by which you are called" is "which is called upon you." Here James indicates that it is a rich unbeliever who blasphemes the name of the Lord.

THE ROYAL LAW

Verse 8 says, "If indeed you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, You shall love your neighbor as yourself, you do well." The royal law refers to the commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." This is the king of all laws, and covers and fulfills all laws (Gal. 5:14; Rom. 13:8-10). Loving God and loving our neighbor are the greatest requirements of the law. All the law hangs on these (Matt. 22:36-40).

In verse 9 James says, "But if you respect persons, you commit sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors." This indicates that to respect persons is contrary to the law, and anything contrary to the law is sin. Having respect of persons is against the royal law, the commandment to love our neighbor as ourself. To say to a poor man, "You stand here, or sit under my footstool," is not to love. We would not like to be treated in this way. The point in verse 9 is that those who respect persons commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

In verse 10 James goes on to say, "For whoever keeps the whole law, yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all." The word in verses 8 through 11 indicates

that the Jewish believers at James' time were still practicing the keeping of the Old Testament law. This corresponds to the word in Acts 21:20 spoken by James and the elders in Jerusalem to Paul. James, the elders in Jerusalem, and many thousands of Jewish believers still remained in a mixture of the Christian faith and the Mosaic law. They even advised Paul to practice such a semi-Judaic mixture (Acts 21:17-26). They were unaware that the dispensation of law was altogether over and that the dispensation of grace should be fully honored, and that any disregard of the distinction between these two dispensations would be against God's dispensational administration and would be a great damage to God's economical plan for the building up of the church as the expression of Christ. Thus, James' Epistle was written under the cloud of a semi-Judaic mixture, under a background that made matters obscure.

JUDGED BY THE LAW OF FREEDOM

In verse 11 James says, "For He who said, Do not commit adultery, also said, Do not murder. Now if you do not commit adultery, but you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law." According to the context, this verse indicates that telling a poor brother to sit under our footstool is equal to killing him. To treat a poor brother in this way is to commit murder, for to despise a poor brother is to kill him.

Verse 12 continues, "So speak and so do as those who are about to be judged by a law of freedom." "So" both times does not refer to what has gone before, but to what follows. The law of freedom here and in 1:25 refers to the same law, which is the law of life. James 2:8-11, as also 4:11, speaks of keeping the law of letters. James 2:12 speaks of judgment upon the believers by the law of life. The believers should speak and do according to the law of life, which surpasses the law of letters. They should live according to the law of life. This kind of living surpasses the keeping of the law of letters. The unbelievers will be judged by the law of letters, which is the law of Moses, at

the great white throne (Rev. 20:11-15). The believers will be judged by the law of life, the law of freedom, which is the law of Christ, at His judgment seat (2 Cor. 5:10).

When I was young, I could not understand 2:11 and 12. I knew that in the New Testament God does not want us to keep the Old Testament law. But here James talks about keeping the Old Testament law. His word corresponds to what is recorded in Acts 21. But then in verse 12 James tells us that we shall be judged by another law, by the perfect law. Now I understand that in the mind of James the Old Testament law and the New Testament law were mixed. James did not make a distinction between the Old Testament law and the New Testament law.

First James talks about keeping the law, and then he speaks about being judged by Christ according to the law of freedom, according to the law of the New Testament. This indicates that James mixed these laws together.

According to the clear revelation of the Bible, there will be three major judgments to come. The first will be the judgment at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). This judgment will be carried out in the air, and it will be executed upon all the raptured and resurrected believers. That judgment will not be related to salvation or perdition. Because that judgment will concern believers, the question of salvation will have been eternally settled. That judgment will determine whether the believers will receive a reward or suffer loss. God's intention is first to give us salvation. Then if we live by God's salvation, we shall receive God's reward. We receive salvation in this age, the church age, and we receive the reward in the next age, in the age of the millennial kingdom. This judgment of the believers is the first major judgment that is coming.

The second major judgment is recorded in Matthew 25. This judgment will take place after the Lord comes back with the overcoming saints and destroys Antichrist and his army at Armageddon. Then the Lord Jesus will set up His throne of glory in Jerusalem. All the living Gentiles will be gathered before the Lord to be judged. As the Lord judges them, He will divide them into sheep and goats. The

goats will go to the lake of fire, and the sheep will be transferred into the millennial kingdom to become the nations. Second Timothy 4:1 says that God has appointed the Lord Jesus to judge the living and the dead. According to Matthew 25, He will judge the living at the throne of His glory at the beginning of the thousand years.

At the end of the thousand years there will be the third major judgment. This will be the judgment of all dead unbelievers, a judgment that will take place at the great white throne. By these three judgments the Lord will clear up the situation among human beings.

When the Lord Jesus judges the believers at His judgment seat, He will not judge them according to the law of Moses or according to His gospel. Instead, He will judge them according to the law of freedom, that is, according to the perfect law. In 2:12 James refers to the judgment of the believers according to the law of freedom at the judgment seat of Christ.

On the one hand, James warns the believers that they will be judged by Christ according to the New Testament. On the other hand, he charges the recipients of this Epistle to keep the Old Testament law. This indicates again James' lack of a clear view according to God's economy. It indicates that he did not have a clear vision about the distinction between the Old Testament and New Testament. He mixed the two dispensations together; that is, he mixed the law of the Old Testament with the law of the New Testament.

JUDGMENT WITHOUT MERCY

In 2:13 James says, "For the judgment is without mercy to him who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment." To despise a poor brother is to have no mercy. Anyone who despises a poor brother in this way will not receive mercy when he appears before the judgment seat of Christ.

Here James is telling us not to despise our brother. If we despise a brother, this means that we do not have mercy on him. Then when we come before the Lord to be judged, He will not show mercy to us, because we have not

shown mercy to our brother. Therefore, we need to show mercy, for, as James says, mercy triumphs over, boasts over, judgment. If we have mercy on our brother today, we shall receive mercy from the Lord at His judgment seat.

I appreciate James' word in verse 13. What he says here may be likened to gold. However, in his Epistle he mixes gold with clay. Therefore, the readers of his Epistle need to distinguish between the gold and the clay.

JUSTIFIED BY WORKS IN RELATION TO THE BELIEVERS

Let us come now to 2:14-16, a section that speaks of being justified by works in relation to the believers. Many talk about this portion without realizing that it concerns our relationship with other believers. If we say that we have faith, we should love the brothers and sisters. This means that we are justified by deeds of love in relation to the believers.

Verse 14 says, "What is the profit, my brothers, if anyone says he has faith, but does not have works? Can that faith save him?" Here James is not talking about being saved from perdition, but is speaking about being saved from judgment at the judgment seat of Christ. The context indicates this.

However, when many Christians read the Bible, they think that "saved" means to go to heaven. They may not realize that the judgment at the judgment seat of Christ is not a matter of heaven or hell. As we have seen, that judgment concerns reward or the suffering of dispensational punishment. If someone says he has faith but does not have any works of love, this means that he does not love the brothers and sisters. Therefore, when such a one stands before the judgment seat of Christ, he will be judged without mercy. We need works of mercy and love in order to be saved from merciless judgment. Hence, to be saved in verse 14 is to be saved from merciless judgment at the judgment seat of Christ. But if we do not

show mercy toward fellow believers, we shall not receive mercy from the Lord at His judgment seat.

Verses 15 and 16 prove that this understanding of "saved" in verse 14 is correct: "If a brother or sister is without clothing and lacks daily food, and anyone of you says to them, Go in peace, be warmed and filled, yet you do not give them the necessities of the body, what is the profit?" In verse 14 James is concerned for us; in verses 15 and 16 his concern is for those who are not properly cared for by us. The Greek word rendered "is" indicates that the brother or sister has been in this condition for some time. If we do not care for the necessities of the saints, we are caring neither for them nor for ourselves.

One day we shall be judged by Christ. If we care for the needs of the saints, exercising mercy on them, at the same time we are taking care of ourselves in relation to the Lord's judgment of us. Because of our merciful and loving work toward the saints, we shall be saved from merciless judgment at the Lord's judgment seat.

It is shameful for the necessities of the poor saints not to be cared for in the church life. However, James' word in verse 16, for the strengthening of his view of practical Christian perfection, carries the flavor of the Old Testament concern for needy people (Deut. 15:7-8).

In verses 17 through 19 James goes on to say, "Even so faith, if it does not have works, is dead in itself. But someone will say, You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one. You do well. The demons also believe and shudder." Faith is of life; it is living and works through love (Gal. 5:6). Otherwise, it is a dead faith, not genuine (James 2:20, 26).

In verse 20 James says, "But are you willing to know, O vain man, that faith without works is useless?" The Greek word rendered "useless" also means barren. Some manuscripts read "dead."

In verse 20 James uses the expression "vain man." According to James, a person is vain if he only believes but does not have love. Anyone who believes in the Lord Jesus

but does not love the brothers is vain. In this sense, a vain man is one who has faith without love. As James says, faith without works is useless.

In verse 21 James asks, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar?" Immediately James continues in verse 22, "You see that faith worked together with his works, and by works faith was completed." It was in Genesis 15 that Abraham believed in God, and in Genesis 22 that he offered Isaac his son. This indicates that there was a period of time wherein Abraham's faith was completed. It was necessary to have his faith testified. Abraham first believed in God, and later his believing was testified by offering up Isaac to God. Likewise, our believing in the Lord Jesus also needs to be testified or vindicated. For example, I hope that a young person who believes in the Lord will have his faith testified or vindicated to his parents by a change of attitude and behavior. This means that an outward work of love testifies, vindicates, the faith that is within us.

In verses 23 and 24 James says, "And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, And Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness, and he was called a friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith only." In verse 23 James again mixes things. The first part of this verse refers to Genesis 15:6, when Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness; the second part of the verse refers to a later time when Abraham was called a friend of God (2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8).

In verse 24 James continues, "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith only." To be justified by faith is for receiving the divine life (Rom. 5:18); to be justified by works is through living the divine life. Since the living is the issue of life, to be justified by works is the issue of being justified by faith. Abraham's offering of Isaac and Rahab's receiving the messengers and thrusting them out (Josh. 2:1-21; 6:23) are both works which issued from their living faith. A living tree surely brings forth fruit.

To

be justified by works does not contradict being justified by faith. The latter is the cause, bringing forth the first, and the first is the effect, the outcome and proof of the latter.

In verses 25 and 26 James concludes, "And in like manner was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works in that she received the messengers as guests and thrust them out by a different way? For as the body without a spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." The spirit gives life to the body (Gen. 2:7); the works indicate and express the life that is in the faith.

This chapter begins with having no respect of persons (vv. 1-13), and arrives at the practical care for the necessities of the poor saints, which is the justifying work of faith (vv. 14-26). According to James' view, these virtues may be considered characteristics of practical Christian perfection.

LIFE-STUDY OF JAMES

MESSAGE SEVEN

PRACTICAL VIRTUES OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

(7)

Scripture Reading: James 2:1-26

In 2 Timothy 2:15 Paul speaks about cutting straight the word of the truth. To cut straight the word of the truth means to unfold the Word of God in its various parts rightly and straightly without distortion. Throughout the centuries many teachers have tried to cut straight, or rightly divide, the holy Word. However, many Bible teachers were not able to do this very well.

At the time of the Reformation, Luther took the lead to rightly divide the holy Word. He saw that justification by faith should be divided from works. Although Luther could divide the Word in the way of certain principles, or in the way of a sketch, he did not have the ability to divide the Word in details. We may say that he knew the main roads of the Word, but not the streets and lanes.

In the eighteenth century Zinzendorf was raised up by the Lord, and to some extent he improved the dividing of the holy Word. In the nineteenth century the British brothers under the leadership of John Nelson Darby were raised up, and they were much more able to divide the Word properly. Much of today's fundamental theology follows the line of the theology of the British brothers. In this century we were raised up by the Lord by His sovereignty and mercy. Standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before us, we are now able to divide the holy Word not merely according to the main roads, but also according to the streets, lanes, and alleys.

We have pointed out that Luther called the Epistle of James an "epistle of straw." Luther said this mainly

because of what is written in chapter two of the book of James. This word of Luther indicates that he did not understand this chapter properly and that he was not able to divide the Word in a detailed way. He did not realize that the word "save" in 2:14 has nothing to do with eternal salvation. This verse says, "What is the profit, my brothers, if anyone says he has faith, but does not have works? Can that faith save him?" Some have wrongly used this verse to teach that salvation is not only by faith.

The word "save" in verse 14 is related to the judgment spoken of in verse 13: "For the judgment is without mercy to him who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment." According to the context, in this chapter to be saved is to be saved from judgment without mercy. The judgment mentioned in verse 13 is not the judgment at the white throne. That judgment determines whether people will be saved or perish. The judgment in this verse is the judgment by Christ at His judgment seat in the air at the time of His coming back. After all the saints have been raptured, they will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. The matter of eternal salvation will have been settled already. However, the Lord will still judge the saints according to the law of freedom, that is, according to the entire New Testament, not according to the law of Moses. This judgment will not determine our eternal salvation; rather, it will determine whether we shall be rewarded or be judged without mercy.

WORKS OF MERCY AND LOVE

In order to be saved from judgment without mercy, we need to have the works of mercy and love. These works testify that our faith issues in being saved not only from perdition, but also from judgment without mercy at the judgment seat of Christ. Those who do not have the works of mercy and love will suffer judgment without mercy. This means that they will be disciplined as a result of judgment at the judgment seat of Christ.

Many of the past teachers of the Scriptures have not

seen the "lane" in these verses. They saw only certain main streets. By the Lord's mercy and through the help we have received from those who have gone before us, we can see the proper way to divide the Word here. In this chapter we have a certain lane. Because we are able to divide this portion of the Word properly, we can see that salvation here is not salvation from perdition; instead, it is salvation from unmerciful judgment at the judgment seat of Christ.

According to this chapter, to despise a poor brother is to murder him (vv. 2:3, 11). This is to fail to have mercy on the brother. If we do not show mercy to a poor brother, when the Lord comes back He will exercise unmerciful judgment upon us, and we shall suffer as a result. If we would be saved from such unmerciful judgment, we need to have works of mercy and love toward the brothers. These works toward the poor brothers will testify that our faith is living, even issuing in our being saved from unmerciful judgment at the judgment seat of Christ. This is the proper understanding of these verses, the understanding that comes from rightly dividing the Word in a detailed way.

Through the centuries there have been different opinions concerning the Epistle of James. Whereas Luther said that this book is an Epistle of straw, a number of pious and godly people have sided with James. The Brethren, especially Darby, wrote about James from the standpoint of dispensation. Darby pointed out strongly that this Epistle has a Jewish character. However, not even Darby saw the real position and intrinsic contents of this book.

A number of years ago we interpreted the Epistle of James in such a way as to reconcile justification by faith with justification by works. Now we see that, under the light we have today, that interpretation was not accurate. In chapter two James speaks of being saved by works. In the past we interpreted this to mean that justification by faith is something inward and that justification by works is outward. Justification by faith is the seed inwardly, and justification by works is the fruit produced outwardly. This interpretation is rather general, and the application is not

accurate. In chapter two of James, to be saved by works is

related to the salvation of our soul (1:21). This is not a matter of eternal salvation from perdition; it is a matter of the salvation of our soul from unmerciful judgment at Christ's judgment seat.

In 2:9 and 10 James says, "But if you respect persons, you commit sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law, yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all." To respect persons is to look down on a poor brother and to uplift a rich brother. According to what James says in 2:11, to look down upon a poor brother is to commit murder.

In verse 12 James goes on to say, "So speak and so do as those who are about to be judged by a law of freedom." This judgment will not be that at the white throne, for the judgment at the white throne will be the judgment of unbelievers. In verse 12 James writes concerning the judgment of believers at the judgment seat of Christ. We need to be clear that this judgment is not for eternal salvation or eternal perdition; on the contrary, this judgment concerns reward or punishment. Furthermore, the judgment at the judgment seat of Christ will not be according to the Mosaic law, but will be according to the law of freedom, that is, according to the New Testament. The Mosaic law will be used for the judgment at the white throne, but the law of freedom will be the basis for the judgment at the judgment seat of Christ.

In verse 13 James says that judgment will be without mercy to him who has shown no mercy, and that mercy triumphs over judgment. If we look down on a poor brother, we do not show mercy toward him. If we do not have mercy on a brother today, when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, Christ will not have mercy toward us.

In verse 13 James tells us that mercy triumphs over judgment. Mercy is the first step that leads to love. If we do not have mercy, we will not have love. We need to realize that before Christ we are extremely poor. If we have mercy toward the poor ones today, then at the time of the judgment at the judgment seat of Christ, Christ will

have

mercy on us. This is what it means for mercy to triumph over judgment.

Let us consider verse 14 again: "What is the profit, my brothers, if anyone says he has faith, but does not have works? Can that faith save him?" Now we understand that this verse refers to being saved from unmerciful judgment at the judgment seat of Christ. We may say that we have faith and yet not have mercy upon a poor brother. This means that we claim to have faith and yet do not love this brother. Can this kind of faith save us from the coming judgment at Christ's judgment seat? To be sure, this kind of faith cannot save us from that judgment.

Verses 15 and 16 support this understanding: "If a brother or sister is without clothing and lacks daily food, and anyone of you says to them, Go in peace, be warmed and filled, yet you do not give them the necessities of the body, what is the profit?" These verses are a further indication that the judgment in verse 13 is related to how we treat the brothers. This is a strong proof that the judgment here is not a matter of eternal salvation or eternal perdition. Verses 15 and 16 speak of our attitude toward the brothers and the way we treat them. Our attitude toward the saints will be a deciding factor regarding whether or not we are rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ.

In verses 17 and 18 James continues, "Even so faith, if it does not have works, is dead in itself. But someone will say, You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." The works here are works of mercy and love toward the brothers. Once again, in these verses faith and works are not a matter of eternal salvation, but are related to being saved from judgment at Christ's judgment seat.

JAMES AND GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

The writing of James is very much involved with the matter of dispensation. But his view was not clear concerning God's dispensation. By dispensation here we mean God's New Testament economy. "Economy" is an anglicized form of the Greek *oikonomia*, a word that

means household arrangement and refers to God's management.

James was born of Mary, who was also the mother of the Lord Jesus. If you read Mary's praise recorded in chapter two of the Gospel of Luke, you will see that it contains many quotations from the Old Testament. This indicates that Mary was very godly, much like the parents of John the Baptist. As a godly person, Mary was knowledgeable concerning God's word in the Old Testament. James, therefore, was raised by a godly mother. No doubt, Mary's godliness was in the Old Testament dispensation, and certainly she taught her children to be godly in this Old Testament way. However, Mary may never have seen God's New Testament economy.

Eventually, James believed in the Lord Jesus. This, no doubt, was a great turn for him to make. But before James believed in the Lord, he may already have been godly in an Old Testament sense.

We may compare this James with Peter, James, and John. John and James were brothers and also cousins to the James who wrote this Epistle, for their mother was a sister of Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus and this James. Like Peter, John and James were uncultured Galilean fisherman. The Lord Jesus even called the brothers James and John "sons of thunder." After the Lord's resurrection, this James became one of the apostles (Gal. 1:19). Eventually, he became the leading elder in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:2, 13; 21:18). By comparison, James may have been more godly and cultured than Peter, John, and James. He knew the Old Testament, probably the book of Proverbs especially, very well. Those in Jerusalem regarded James highly, and he became the most influential person among the believers there.

The fact that James was the most influential believer in Jerusalem is proved by what is recorded in Galatians 2:11 and 12. Here we see that before certain ones came from James, Peter ate with the Gentiles. (Paul does not say that they came from Jerusalem, but that they came

from

James). After the ones came from James, Peter was afraid, shrank back, and separated himself. This indicates that even Peter was afraid of James and also proves that James was the top influence in Jerusalem. Chapter fifteen of Acts also proves that the influence of James was prevailing. Furthermore, in Acts 21 we are told that when Paul went the last time to Jerusalem, he went to see James. Acts 21 does not say that Paul went to the elders, but that he went to James, where all the elders were assembled. James, therefore, was the center of the eldership. He was prevailing, and the entire situation was under his influence.

In Acts 21 we can see what James' influence was. James pointed out to Paul that in Jerusalem tens of thousands believed in the Lord Jesus and were zealous for the law. Therefore, James encouraged Paul to go to the temple with certain men who had a vow on them. James' word in Acts 21 gives us a view of the intrinsic contents of his writing.

James definitely believed in the Lord Jesus. Several points in his Epistle prove this. First, James says that we have been begotten by the Father of lights by the word of truth (1:17-18). This is New Testament regeneration. James also speaks of receiving with meekness the implanted word (1:21). This also is a New Testament matter. Then James goes on to speak of the perfect law, the law of freedom (1:25), and of the indwelling Spirit (4:5). In chapter five he refers to the church when he mentions the elders of the church. In addition, in 2:1 James speaks of "the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory."

However, along with these positive matters concerning God's New Testament economy, James brings in things of the Old Testament. For example, he speaks of the synagogue. He also indicates that for him keeping the perfect law is a matter of visiting orphans and widows. This word is full of the Old Testament flavor. James does not speak of living Christ, of walking in the Spirit, or of having a life for the building up of the Body of Christ. Rather, his illustrations are from the Old Testament or

have an Old Testament flavor. Even James' way of praying is according to Elijah's way. James charges the elders to pray for the sick according to the way Elijah prayed in the Old Testament. In a similar way, he charges us to wait for the Lord's coming back in a way that is similar to Job's endurance and to the longsuffering of the prophets. Again, both examples are drawn from the Old Testament. Therefore, what we have in the Epistle of James is a mixture of the things of the Old Testament with God's New Testament economy.

Although we have all the Life-study messages on the writings of Paul and although we may have seen the central focus of the divine revelation in the New Testament, we still may be in a cloudy atmosphere. We may think that to have good character means that we are godly. We may also have a natural understanding or religious understanding of what godliness is. Our view of godliness may not be according to the New Testament economy of God. Once again we see the need for a clear vision of God's New Testament economy.

LIFE-STUDY OF JAMES

MESSAGE EIGHT

PRACTICAL VIRTUES OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

(8)

Scripture Reading: James 3:1-18

In this message we come to chapter three of the Epistle of James. Verses 1 through 12 of this chapter are concerned with bridling the tongue, and verses 13 through 18, with behaving in wisdom.

BRIDLING THE TONGUE

It is extremely difficult to bridle our tongue. For example, you may find that you are not able to keep yourself from speaking even for an hour. But if we fail to bridle our tongue, we are foolish. However, if we restrict our tongue, we are wise. Wisdom in practical Christian perfection is related to restricting our tongue.

In James 3 two words are crucial--the tongue and wisdom. For years I was not able to understand the last part of this chapter, the verses concerning wisdom. I could not understand them because I did not have the key. But now I have seen that the key is that restricting our tongue is the way to have wisdom. Foolishness is related to talking too much, and wisdom is related to bridling our tongue.

In 3:1 James says, "Do not become many teachers, my brothers, knowing that we shall receive greater judgment." Teachers tend to bring in different teachings, and this produces different opinions and causes trouble and division (see 2 Tim. 4:3; 1 Tim. 1:3-4, 7; Eph. 4:14).

In verse 1 James says that teachers will receive greater judgment. Whatever we say will be judged, and we shall be judged by our words (Matt. 12:36-37).

Although we need to learn to bridle our tongue in our daily living, we all should be encouraged to speak in the church meetings. If this becomes our practice, the meetings will be greatly uplifted, blessing will come, and problems will be solved.

Problems in married life are often due to the tongue. If a husband and wife would bridle their tongues, many of their problems would be solved. But because some have an unruly tongue, this tongue creates serious problems, and these problems may even result in divorce.

According to my experience in human life, I can testify that the best way to avoid trouble is to restrict our tongue. Regarding the proper use of our tongue, we need to ask God for wisdom. The wisdom James speaks of in chapter three is a continuation of that mentioned in chapter one. We need wisdom to know how to use our tongue.

In 1:19 James says, "Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." Speaking often stirs up wrath. But if we restrict our tongue, we shall also limit our anger. For example, suppose you are somewhat unhappy with a certain person, and you point out to him something he has done wrong. Simply by speaking to him in this way you may strike a "match" that is able to start a great "fire." But if you would restrain yourself from speaking to him concerning that matter, his wrath would not be stirred up. Therefore, in his wisdom James tells us to be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.

Married brothers need to practice this with their wives. They should be quick to hear their wives, but slow to speak to them. For example, if your wife complains to you about something, you will be wise if you hear her but are slow to speak. If you speak in haste, you may stir up a fire that can cause serious problems.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF AN UNBRIDLED TONGUE

In 3:5 and 6 James likens the tongue to a fire: "So also the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. Behold, how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the

tongue is a fire, the world of unrighteousness; the tongue is set among our members, contaminating the whole body and setting on fire the course of life and is set on fire by Gehenna." Gehenna is the symbol of the lake of fire--hell (Rev. 20:15). The "fire" in verse 5 is a wildfire with spreading power, and the fire in verse 6 is an evil fire from Gehenna that contaminates us. Like the wildfire the tongue spreads its destruction, and like the evil fire it contaminates our whole body with evils from Gehenna.

In verse 6 the Greek word for "course" is *trochos*, referring generally to anything round or circular which runs or rolls, like a wheel. Used figuratively, it indicates a circuit of physical effects, a course, like the orbit around the sun. The Greek word for "life" is *genesis*, meaning origin, birth, generation; hence, the wheel of birth referring figuratively to our human life, set in motion at its birth and running on to its close. The tongue as an evil fire from Gehenna sets on fire our human life, as a wheel, from our birth to our death, so that the course of our entire life may be wholly under the tongue's evil contamination and corruption.

In verses 7 and 8a James goes on to say, "For every nature, both of beasts and of birds, both of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human nature; but the tongue no one among men is able to tame." Every nature of beasts on the land, of birds in the air, of reptiles in the dust, and of creatures in the water, has been tamed by the nature of man, which is stronger than all the animal natures. However, even the stronger human nature is not able to tame the tongue.

In 8b James says that the tongue is a "restless evil, full of death-bringing poison." As a restless evil the tongue never ceases to do evil. It is full of death-bringing poison. Evil and death go together with the tongue. It spreads evil and death to contaminate and poison all human beings. It is the same even among Christians.

In verses 3 through 12, in dealing with the problem of the tongue, James in his wisdom concerning human life uses twenty different items for his illustrations: bridles of

horses, rudders of ships, wildfire, the world of unrighteousness, fire from Gehenna, wheel of birth, beasts, birds, reptiles, creatures of the sea, human nature, restless evil, death-bringing poison, a spring, a fig tree, olives, a vine, figs, salt (bitter) water, and sweet water. He was rich, somewhat like Solomon, the wise king of the Old Testament (1 Kings 4:29-34), in wisdom concerning human life, but not so in wisdom concerning the divine economy.

MEEKNESS OF WISDOM

In verse 13 James says, "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by his good manner of life his works in meekness of wisdom." According to the context, meekness of wisdom should refer here to restraint in speaking. This corresponds to Proverbs 10:19. Such meekness equals forbearing and yielding in verse 17, in contrast to bitter jealousy and rivalry in boasting and lying in verse 14.

In verse 13 James mentions being wise before having understanding. If we do not have wisdom, we cannot have understanding. Knowing this, in Ephesians 1 Paul prayed that God would grant us a spirit of wisdom. Whereas a wise man has understanding, a foolish person is not able to understand others.

WISDOM AND OUR SPIRIT

What is wisdom? It is very difficult to say what wisdom is, because wisdom is abstract. Understanding is in our mind, but where is wisdom? According to my experience, wisdom is in our spirit. This means that wisdom is found not in our mind, emotion, will, soul, or heart; wisdom is in our deepest part. When we exercise our spirit, stay in the spirit in every situation, and do things according to the spirit, we shall have wisdom.

When some hear that wisdom is in the spirit, they may say, "James was a man who emphasized wisdom in practical Christian perfection. Why did he not say that wisdom is in our spirit?" Although James does not say this explicitly, he gives us a hint that wisdom is in our spirit. In

3:17 he speaks of "the wisdom from above." Here "from above" means from God. Anything that comes to us from God must touch our spirit. John 4:24 says that God is Spirit and that they who worship Him must worship in spirit. This indicates that in order to contact God, we must use our spirit. Likewise, when God contacts us, He touches our spirit. Hence, the wisdom that comes from above, from God, must surely come to our spirit. It does not come to our mind, soul, or heart; it comes to our spirit, our God-contacting organ. Therefore, it is correct to say that here we have a hint that wisdom is in our spirit.

Because wisdom is in the spirit, we can have wisdom only by remaining in our spirit. God is the source of wisdom, and He gives wisdom. But the wisdom that comes from God reaches our spirit. Just as we need to use the proper organs for seeing, hearing, and eating, so we need to use the right organ--our spirit--in order to have wisdom.

THE WISDOM FROM ABOVE

In verses 14 and 15 James goes on to say, "But if you have bitter jealousy and rivalry in your heart, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom is not coming down from above, but is earthly, soulish, demonic." By "this wisdom" in verse 15 James means the wisdom of having bitter jealousy and rivalry to boast and lie against the truth (v. 14). Moreover, in verse 15 "earthly" refers to the world, "soulish" to the natural man, and "demonic" to the Devil and his demons. These three are always linked one to another.

Verse 17 says, "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, forbearing, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, unfeigned." This wisdom includes meekness in verse 13 and the human virtues mentioned in verse 17. These are all characteristics of practical Christian perfection according to James' view. His view may have been somewhat under the influence of Old Testament precepts concerning man's behavior, morality, and ethics (Prov. 4:5-8). Such wisdom does not attain to the

height of the wisdom concerning the hidden mystery of God's New Testament economy regarding Christ and the church (1 Cor. 2:6-8; Eph. 3:9-11).

In verse 17 James says that the wisdom from above is forbearing. To be forbearing means to be gentle, lenient, and sweetly reasonable (Phil. 4:5). To be forbearing also means to give in. By this we can see that the virtue of forbearance comprises a number of other virtues. The first virtue included in forbearance is that of restricting our tongue. When a brother is tempted to argue with his wife, he needs to forbear or to give in. If he is quick to hear and slow to speak, he will be forbearing. Forbearance is one of the outstanding virtues of practical Christian perfection.

James also says that the wisdom from above is compliant or yielding, that is, willing to yield, satisfied with less than its due, easy to be entreated. To be forbearing and compliant equals meekness in verse 13. To be compliant is to be flexible, able to fit in with any kind of environment.

In verse 17 James also tells us that the wisdom from above is full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, and unfeigned. Because this wisdom is impartial, it does not take sides with anyone. The fact that this wisdom is unfeigned means that it is honest, true, faithful, trustworthy, altogether without hypocrisy. These are virtues that issue from the wisdom that comes to our spirit from above. If we would have this wisdom, we need to pray for it. This is the teaching of James.

JAMES' VIEW OF WISDOM COMPARED WITH PAUL'S

At this point we need to compare what James says concerning wisdom with what Paul says in his Epistles. The wisdom taught by Paul was actually Christ Himself. In 1 Corinthians 1:30 Paul says that Christ became wisdom to us from God. However, James does not point out that the wisdom that comes to us from God is Christ. Rather, his way of speaking about wisdom is very similar to Solomon's way in the book of Proverbs. James was saturated with the

Old Testament atmosphere, and his way of speaking about wisdom bears an Old Testament color and flavor. When James speaks concerning wisdom, he does not impress us with Christ. When he tells us that true wisdom comes from above, from God, his word does not have a New Testament color or flavor. It does not have the flavor of Christ. Paul, on the contrary, teaches that wisdom is Christ Himself.

James says that if we lack wisdom, we should ask God for it, and He will give it generously. According to James, wisdom is something given by God. Paul's view is different. Instead of saying that God gives us wisdom, Paul says that Christ has become wisdom to us from God. This implies a transmission from God to us. We may use as an illustration the transmission of electricity from a power plant to our homes. The power plant does not give us an amount of electricity in a container. No, the electricity from the power plant is transmitted into our homes continually. This means that there is "fellowship" between our homes and the power plant. If electricity were given some other way, there would be no need for "communication" between our homes and the power plant. In like manner, instead of being given to us, the heavenly electricity is continually transmitted into our being. In order to receive this transmission, we simply need to turn on the "switch" of our spirit. If the switch is turned off, the transmission ceases. But if the switch stays on, the transmission will take place continually. This illustrates Paul's understanding of Christ as our wisdom.

Paul's understanding of wisdom is certainly much deeper than that of James. We may have the assurance to say that James was saturated with the element of the Old Testament. On the one hand, we may be helped by the Epistle of James to see our need for practical Christian perfection. On the other hand, we need to see from Paul's writings that the proper way to receive wisdom is to pray by "switching on" our spirit. When our spirit is switched on, the Spirit of God will be transmitted into us. The Spirit does not transmit wisdom into us as something apart from

Christ. Rather, the Spirit transmits Christ Himself into us as our wisdom.

Actually, there is no need for us even to use the term wisdom or to ask for wisdom by name. We simply need to switch on our spirit and allow the Spirit of God to transmit the riches of the divine Trinity into our being. Then we should live a life that is Christ Himself, a life that is wisdom. This is not wisdom as something given to us by God; it is Christ, the living Person, as wisdom transmitted from God into our spirit. Whatever is transmitted into us in such a way is actually Christ Himself as the life-giving Spirit. When we live this Christ by being one spirit with the Lord, our living will be a totality of wisdom.

In 1 Corinthians 2:6 and 7a Paul says, "But we speak wisdom among those who are full-grown, yet a wisdom not of this age, neither of the rulers of this age, who are being brought to nought; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery." This wisdom is for the matured ones. In 1 Corinthians 1:24 Paul says that Christ is God's wisdom. In Colossians 2:3 Paul says that in Christ "are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden." Since wisdom is stored up in Christ as a treasure, if we do not have Christ, we cannot have wisdom.

We know from the Old Testament that Solomon also spoke about wisdom. The Bible says that God gave wisdom to Solomon. However, unlike us today, Solomon did not have Christ transmitted into him to be his wisdom. Because James was saturated with the Old Testament, his writing about wisdom has an Old Testament flavor. When we read James' word regarding wisdom, we need to be reminded of what Paul taught concerning wisdom. The teaching of Paul is focused on God's economy. When we read what James says about practical Christian perfection, especially what he says about wisdom, we need to be reminded that Paul teaches that Christ is wisdom from God transmitted into our spirit by the life-giving Spirit. The Epistle of James, therefore, serves not only as a balance and warning, but also serves as a reminder to pay attention to God's economy.

We have pointed out that James encourages us to pray for wisdom. But as long as we exercise our spirit to contact the Lord by praying, we actually do not need to pray specifically for wisdom. As we are contacting the Lord in the spirit, Christ will become wisdom to us. In order to contact the Lord, we need to exercise our spirit and pray unceasingly.

Proper prayer is spiritual breathing. We need to learn how to exercise our spirit in the way of breathing the Lord. No matter what we are doing, we need to contact the Lord by breathing Him in. If we do this, the divine transmission will go on continually, and the riches of the Triune God will be transmitted into our spirit. It is in this way that Christ Himself becomes our wisdom.

A WORD CONCERNING THE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE

Recently some brothers asked me why the book of James is in the Bible. They were wondering if this Epistle was inspired by God, since it seems to contain so much of James' own wisdom. I pointed out to these brothers that we need to understand what it means to say that the Bible is inspired by God. For the Bible to be divinely inspired does not mean that every word in the Bible is God's word. For example, the words of the serpent to Eve in Genesis 3 are not God's words. Likewise, in Matthew 16 certain words spoken by Peter were not the words of God either, but Satan's words spoken through Peter's mouth. What, then, does it mean to say that the Bible is fully inspired word for word by God? It means that it is of God that whatever is recorded in the Bible is included there. Therefore, the words spoken by the serpent in Genesis 3 and the words spoken by Satan through Peter in Matthew 16 have been recorded in the Scriptures by God's inspiration. The writing of this record was fully inspired by God, although the words that were spoken by the serpent and by Satan were not themselves inspired by God. If we are clear concerning this, we shall see that in the Epistle of James certain words were not spoken by God.

On the contrary,

words such as "twelve tribes" and "synagogue" were spoken by James, but recorded by God's inspiration for a particular purpose.

Along with the fourteen Epistles of Paul, we need the Epistle of James to fulfill the purpose of balancing us in our Christian life concerning practical Christian perfection and also warning us of the need to have a clear view of God's New Testament economy.

LIFE-STUDY OF JAMES

MESSAGE NINE

PRACTICAL VIRTUES OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

(9)

Scripture Reading: James 4:1-10

In this message we shall consider what James says in 4:1-10 concerning dealing with pleasures, the world, and the Devil. However, before we consider these matters, I would like to give a further brief word on the contrast between wisdom as it is revealed in the writings of James and wisdom as revealed in the writings of Paul.

TWO LEVELS OF WISDOM

In 1:5 James says, "If anyone of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and does not reproach, and it will be given to him." Then in 3:13 James says, "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by his good manner of life his works in meekness of wisdom." Then in 3:17 James tells us, "The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, forbearing, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, unfeigned." All these are characteristics of practical Christian perfection according to James' view, which may have been somewhat under the influence of Old Testament precepts concerning man's behavior, morality, and ethics (Prov. 4:5-8). What James says concerning wisdom is on the level of human character. This wisdom does not attain to the height of the wisdom concerning the hidden mystery of God's New Testament economy regarding Christ and the church (1 Cor. 2:6-8; Eph. 3:9-11).

In his writing regarding wisdom, James does not say a word concerning Christ as life or concerning the church

being built up through the experience of the riches of Christ for His expression. Furthermore, in the entire book of James the Spirit of God is mentioned only once (4:5), and that in a negative way. The human spirit is not mentioned at all. By this we see that three crucial matters are not touched by James in his Epistle: Christ as life, the building up of the church through the riches of Christ, and the human spirit. James' only mention of the Holy Spirit of God is in relation to striving against lust (4:5). Because of the shortage in these matters, there is no possibility for James to attain the height of wisdom that we see in the Epistles of Paul.

In his Epistle James seems to present wisdom as something given to us by God once for all. Paul's understanding of wisdom is much higher. According to Paul, wisdom is actually Christ Himself, the embodiment of God, who has been installed in us and who is now being continually transmitted into us. The installation was made once for all, but the transmission is not once for all; it is continuous. We may use electricity as an illustration. Electricity is installed in a building once for all. But once electricity has been installed, there should be a continuous transmission of electricity from the power plant to the building.

The wisdom taught by James is something given by God. But the wisdom taught by Paul is Christ continually transmitting Himself into us. This divine transmission is the divine dispensing. For electricity to be transmitted into a building means that it is dispensed into the building to be used in different ways by those in the building. The principle is the same with Christ as wisdom.

As the embodiment of the Triune God, Christ has been installed in our tripartite being to be transmitted, dispensed, into us all the time so that we may live a life to express Christ and so that the church, the Body of Christ, may be built up as His fullness. What heights Paul reaches in his writing concerning Christ as our wisdom from God!

It is of the Lord's sovereignty that the Epistle of James comes after the fourteen Epistles of Paul. In Paul's

Epistles we see a wisdom that is on the highest level. In James' Epistle we see a wisdom that is on another level, a level of human living.

As we consider the picture of these two levels of wisdom, we shall know where we should be. We should be in God's economy and in practical Christian perfection. On the one hand, we must be for God's economy. God's economy is to dispense Christ as the embodiment of the Triune God into us for the building up of the church as the fullness of Christ. Practical Christian perfection is related to being complete and entire in our conduct, character, and behavior so that we may have a positive testimony before others and even in the sight of angels and demons. If we have such practical Christian perfection, no one will be able to blame us. For God's economy, we need to be those with the practical Christian perfection portrayed by James in his Epistle. Now we can see why these two levels of wisdom--one in the Epistles of Paul and the other in the Epistle of James--are unveiled in the New Testament.

PLEASURES, THE WORLD, AND THE DEVIL

In 4:1-10 James speaks concerning dealing with pleasures, the world, and the Devil. Some may be bothered by the fact that we use the word "pleasures" in a negative sense. In our church life we do not have pleasures--we have enjoyment. In fact, our church life is an enjoyment. This enjoyment is a very positive thing, but worldly pleasures are extremely negative. In 4:1-10 James ranks pleasures with the world and the Devil. One of the virtues of Christian perfection is to overcome pleasures, the world, and the Devil.

Wars, Fightings, and Murder

In 4:1 James says, "From what source come wars and fightings among you? Are they not from this, from your pleasures that war in your members?" The pleasures here are pleasures of the flesh.

James' word in chapter four is rather mixed and not easy to understand. For instance, in verse 1 James speaks of wars and fightings among those who receive his Epistle.

Do you believe that in ancient times there were wars and fightings among the Jewish believers in Jerusalem and among those scattered in the Gentile world? At least to some extent, I do not believe this. How could the believers have been fighting, warring, with one another? James says that these wars and fightings come from the pleasures that war in our members.

In 4:2 James continues, "You desire and do not have; you murder and are jealous, and are not able to obtain; you fight and war. You do not have because you do not ask." Here "desire" means covet, lust. How are we to understand this verse? In verse 1 James speaks of two kinds of wars, wars among the saints and wars in our members. Then in verse 2 he says, "You fight and war." He also says, "You murder and are jealous." I am bothered by what James says in verse 2. I believe that this sense of being bothered is due to the mixture of Judaism with New Testament teachings in James' writing. James was saturated with the ideas, concepts, teachings, ordinances, and practices of the Jewish religion. He was soaked with the element of that religion, and had lived a long time in its sphere and atmosphere. Furthermore, he treasured the things of Judaism. Nevertheless, James was deeply influenced by New Testament teachings. This means that with James there are two elements, two spheres, and two atmospheres. The result is a mixture in his thinking, a mixture of Judaism with the teachings of the New Testament.

Although I have studied 4:1-10, I find it very difficult to cut these verses straight, to divide them properly. Paul's word in 2 Timothy 2:13 regarding cutting straight the word of the truth indicates that we should not divide the Word in a zigzag fashion. But when we come to the book of James, we simply cannot cut or divide the Word in a straight line. As an example of this difficulty, I would call your attention to the word "murder" in 4:2. This word bothers me very much, and I cannot understand what James means by it. Surely James does not mean that believers were actually murdering one another. However, can we spiritualize the word "murder" here? We can easily

understand

what

Paul

means in Romans 8:13 when he speaks of putting to death the practices of the body, but who can understand what James means by murder in this verse? Who was being murdered by whom?

It is not easy to trace James' thought in these verses. He says that those to whom he is writing murder and are jealous, are not able to obtain, and fight and war. This fighting must have been among certain persons. Then at the end of verse 2 James says, "You do not have because you do not ask." On the one hand, James says, "You murder"; on the other hand, he indicates that they should ask. Does this mean that a murderer can ask, that a murderer can pray? I can only present this verse to you and ask you to analyze it and expound it.

In verse 3 James goes on to say, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask evilly, that you may spend it on your pleasures." Literally, the Greek word for "on" means "in." How are we to understand this verse in relation to the preceding verses? There seems to be no "track" for us to trace James' thought.

The Friendship of the World

In verse 4 James says, "Adulteresses, do you not know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever determines to be a friend of the world is constituted an enemy of God." Here James makes a turn from the matter of pleasures to the matter of friendship of the world and enmity with God. James' writing here is marvelous; his word is very descriptive. In verse 4 James clearly says that to be a friend of the world is to be constituted an enemy of God.

In 4:4 James uses the word "adulteresses." God and Christ are our Husband (Isa. 54:5; 2 Cor. 11:2). We should be chaste and love Him alone with our entire being (Mark 12:30). If our heart is divided by loving the world, we become adulteresses.

In verse 4 James uses the words "friendship" and "friend" in relation to the world. Friendship of the world is love of the world for the pleasures of the flesh. The "world"

is the satanic system, which is enmity with God. The Greek word for world, *kosmos*, is used for different things in the New Testament. In Matthew 25:34; John 17:15; Acts 17:24; Ephesians 1:4; and Revelation 13:8, it denotes the material universe as a system created by God. In John 1:29; 3:16; and Romans 5:12, it denotes the fallen human race corrupted and usurped by Satan as components for his evil world system. In 1 Peter 3:3 it denotes adorning, ornament. Here in James 4:4, as in 1 John 2:15; John 15:19; and 17:14 it denotes an order, a set form, an orderly arrangement; hence, an ordered system, set up by Satan, the adversary of God. By this we see that the "world" does not denote the earth. God created man to live on earth for the fulfillment of His purpose. But His enemy Satan, in order to usurp man, has formed an anti-God world system on earth by systematizing mankind with such things as religion, culture, education, industry, commerce, and entertainment, through men's fallen nature in their lusts, pleasures, pursuits, and even in their indulgence in living necessities, such as food, clothing, housing, and transportation. According to what James says in 4:4, loving the world causes a person who loves God to become an enemy of God.

The Indwelling Spirit

In 4:5 James goes on to say, "Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain: The Spirit who dwells in us longs to envy?" When God secured us to be His spouse, He put His Spirit into us to make us one with Him (1 Cor. 6:19, 16-17). He is a jealous God (Exo. 20:5), and His Spirit is jealous over us with the jealousy of God (2 Cor. 11:2), longing, jealously desiring, that we may not make friends with His enemy and be His lover at the same time.

Verse 5 is the only time James mentions God's indwelling Spirit. His one mention of the Spirit is negative, concerning the abolishing of the friendship of the world. It is not positive, concerning the building up of the Body of Christ.

The Greek word rendered "dwells" in 4:5 may also be translated "makes His home." The indwelling Spirit makes

His home in us so that He may occupy our entire being for God (see Eph. 3:17) and cause us to be wholly for our Husband.

In 4:5 James refers to what "the Scripture says." However, I do not know to what verse in the Scriptures James is referring. I do not believe that any Bible teacher has been able to locate the particular verse in the Scriptures.

Translators differ on how to render the Greek words translated, "The Spirit who dwells in us longs to envy." I believe that "longs to envy" is the most accurate translation. This longing comes out of love. For example, a husband who loves his wife is full of longing for her and would be envious if she were to love someone else. He does not want her to love another besides him.

In verses 4 and 5 James uses marriage to illustrate our relationship with God. God is the Husband, and we are His counterpart. As God's counterpart, we should love Him. If we love anything or anyone in place of Him, we become adulteresses. The indwelling Spirit that God has put within us longs to keep us singly for Himself. Whenever we would not be solely for Him but would love the world, this indwelling Spirit will not only be offended, but will also be envious. This is the correct understanding of what James means when he says that the Spirit who dwells in us longs to envy.

In 4:6 James leaps to the matter of grace: "But He gives greater grace; wherefore it says, God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Logically speaking, there does not seem to be a connection between verses 5 and 6. In verse 6 we have a quotation from Proverbs 3:34 according to the Septuagint.

In verses 7 through 10 James says that we should be subject to God, withstand the Devil, draw near to God, cleanse our hands, purify our hearts, be miserable, mourn and weep, let our laughter be turned into mourning and our joy into dejection, and be humbled before the Lord.

As we consider 4:1-10, we see that James skips from one matter to another. This makes it difficult for us to

follow his thought. It is also difficult to cut straight the Word in this portion.

Adulteresses, Enemies, and Sinners

Although it is difficult to trace James' thought from verse to verse, we can see clearly that in 4:1-10 James is concerned with three major items that are problems to us: pleasures (v. 1), the world (v. 4), and the Devil (v. 7). These matters must be thoroughly dealt with. Otherwise, we shall be adulteresses, enemies, and sinners. Surely, as those who love the Lord, we do not want to be adulteresses, enemies of God, and sinners. However, if the problems of pleasures, the world, and the Devil are not dealt with, we may eventually become adulteresses, enemies, and sinners.

I am concerned that some among us may already have become adulteresses and enemies of God. The ones spoken of here are God's people, they belong to God, and they have been born of God. Nevertheless, their actual condition is that of being an enemy of God. The reason they are enemies of God is that there is too much of the world in them. A strong friendship has been built up with the world, the satanic system organized by God's enemy, His adversary. (The fact that Satan is not only God's enemy but also His adversary means that he is an enemy within God's sphere; hence, an adversary).

If a child of God loves the world, and forms a friendship with the world, the world will cause him to become an enemy of God. Such a believer becomes an enemy of God because he takes sides with God's enemy by loving the world, the satanic system. In a very real sense, such a one desires to be incorporated in the satanic system of the world. Therefore, in the sight of God, he becomes an enemy. Furthermore, he also becomes a sinner. By this we see that, according to one's actual condition, a child of God may be an adulteress, an enemy of God, and a sinner.

Pleasures and Lust

In order not to become adulteresses, enemies, and sinners, we need to deal with pleasures, the world, and the

Devil. Pleasures are related to lust. If we did not have lust, we would not need pleasure. Joy, however, is not related to lust. God is a joyful God, and joy is for our being, not for our lust. It is right for us to be joyful, but it is not right to have pleasures that are related to lust.

Those who seek pleasure are those who indulge their lust. Throughout the world, Sunday has become a day of pleasure. This day, generally speaking, is no longer regarded as the Lord's Day, the day for the Lord's people to fellowship with Him, stay with Him, worship Him, enjoy Him, and rest in Him. On Sundays the worldly people seek to indulge their lusts for the sake of pleasures. Often, the conversation at school or work on a Monday morning is related to sinful, worldly things done over the weekend. Today the people of the world indulge their lusts in all kinds of pleasures.

This lust is also in us. If we do not live in the spirit, we shall not have a way to overcome the indulgence in lusts. We need to have our spirit nourished by the implanted word. Every morning and also during the day we need to be nourished by contacting the implanted word so that our spirit may be strong to withstand lust and even overcome it.

James, a godly man, did not want to see that the believers were becoming involved in lust-indulging pleasures. He knew that such pleasures would constitute them adulteresses, enemies of God, and even sinners. He knew that all these pleasures are related to the world. To use the weekend to seek pleasure is to love the world. A believer who spends his weekend in such a way will sink very low spiritually. It may even seem that he would need a huge "crane" to lift him up again.

An Evil Trinity

According to 4:1-10, pleasures are related to the world, and the world is linked to the Devil. Here we have an evil trinity that is versus the divine Trinity. As Christians, we have a Triune God, and we face a triune problem. The triune problem is the devilish trinity of lust, the world, and

the Devil. This trinity is opposed to the divine Trinity--the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The New Testament reveals clearly that the lusts of the flesh are against the Spirit, that the world is against the Father, and that the Devil is against the Son. Galatians 5 says that the flesh with its lusts is against the Spirit, James 4 and 1 John 2 reveal that the world is opposed to God the Father, and 1 John 3 indicates that the Devil, Satan, is against the Son, who came to destroy the works of the Devil. By this we see that the Triune God is fighting against the triune problem, that the divine Trinity--the Father, the Son, and the Spirit--is versus the world, the Devil, and the flesh. If we have a bird's-eye view of 4:1-10, we shall see that in these verses three major things are covered--pleasures, the world, and the Devil.

LIFE-STUDY OF JAMES

MESSAGE TEN

PRACTICAL VIRTUES OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

(10)

Scripture Reading: James 4:6-17

In the foregoing message we considered three major problems found in 4:1-10. These problems are pleasures, the world, and the Devil. In this message we shall go on to consider what James says in 4:6-17.

GREATER GRACE

In verse 6 James says, "But He gives greater grace; wherefore it says, God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." The pronoun "it" in this verse refers to the Scripture in verse 5. The latter part of verse 6 is a quotation from the Septuagint, Proverbs 3:34. This verse says, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." According to the context, this means to be proud toward God. Being proud toward God causes Him to resist us. To be humble is also toward God, and this causes Him to give us grace, as He desires.

We need to learn to draw near to God (v. 8) to receive greater grace. Instead of being proud and resisting God, we should receive in meekness the implanted word. Someone who is proud cannot receive God's implanted word. If we are humble, we shall receive the implanted word, and we shall also receive greater grace.

BEING SUBJECT TO GOD

In verse 7 James continues, "Be subject therefore to God; but withstand the Devil, and he will flee from you."

To be subject to God is to be humble toward God (v. 10; 1 Pet. 5:6).

To be proud toward God is to side with God's enemy, the Devil. To be humble toward God, that is, to be subject to God, is to withstand the Devil, that is, stand against the Devil. This is the best strategy to fight God's enemy; it always causes him to flee from us.

The flesh implied in verse 1, the world in verse 4, and the Devil in verse 7 are the three major enemies of the believers. They are related one to another: the flesh is against the Spirit (Gal. 5:17), the world is against God (1 John 2:15), and the Devil is against Christ (1 John 3:8). The flesh indulges in pleasures by loving the world, and the world usurps us for the Devil. This annuls God's eternal purpose in us.

In verse 8 James goes on to say, "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-souled!" Here, as in 1:8, James uses the expression "double-souled," double-minded. In 1:8, being double-souled is related to doubting in prayer. God made man only one soul with one mind and one will. When a believer doubts in prayer, he makes himself two-souled, like a boat with two rudders, unstable in direction. In 4:8 being double-souled is a matter of having the heart divided for two parties--God and the world. This makes people adulteresses (v. 4) and sinners, who need their hearts purified and their hands cleansed so that they may draw near to God and that God may draw near to them.

In verse 9 James says, "Be miserable and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into dejection." This verse is a solemn admonition to God's adulterous spouse, who, under the usurpation of the Devil, indulges herself in fleshly pleasures by loving the world.

In verse 10 James concludes this section: "Be humbled before the Lord, and He will exalt you." This word, as a conclusion to this section (vv. 1-10), is an exhortation against the fightings and desires mentioned in verses 1 through 3.

NOT SPEAKING AGAINST THE BROTHERS

In verses 11 and 12 James gives us a word about not speaking against the brothers: "Do not speak against one another, brothers. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother speaks against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge. One is Lawgiver and Judge, who is able to save and destroy. But who are you who judges your neighbor?" Notice that in these verses James mentions the law four times. In verse 12 he refers to God as the Lawgiver. James' word here and in 2:8-11 regarding the Old Testament law and his words in 1:25 and 2:12 regarding the perfect law of freedom may indicate that in his understanding there is no distinction between keeping the Old Testament law and living by the perfect law of freedom, the inner law of life. But according to the divine revelation in the entire New Testament, there is a definite, clear distinction between the two. Keeping the Old Testament law merely makes us right with God and men so that we might be justified by the law. But living by the inner law of life (Heb. 8:10-11; Rom. 8:2) is to live and magnify Christ (Phil. 1:20-21) for the building up of His Body to express Him (Eph. 1:22-23) and for the building of God's house to satisfy Him (1 Tim. 3:15). This is for the accomplishment of God's eternal goal according to His New Testament economy. Though we become perfect by keeping the Old Testament law, we are still void of God's eternal goal. Only living by the inner law of life avails for this. Such a living spontaneously and unconsciously fulfills more than what is required under the Old Testament law (Rom. 8:4), even to the standard of the constitution of the kingdom, as revealed in chapters five through seven of the Gospel of Matthew.

CONFIDING NOT IN SELF-WILL BUT IN THE LORD

Thus far, we have covered nine aspects of the practical virtues of Christian perfection: enduring trials by faith (1:2-12), resisting temptation as God-born ones (1:13-18), living a God-fearing life by the implanted word according to the perfect law of freedom (1:19-27), having no respect

of

persons among the brothers (2:1-13), being justified by works in relation to the believers (2:14-26), bridling the tongue (3:1-12), behaving in wisdom (3:13-18), dealing with pleasures, the world, and the Devil (4:1-10), and not speaking against the brothers (4:11-12). In the next section (4:13-17) we have another virtue of practical Christian perfection: confiding not in self-will but in the Lord.

In verse 13 James says, "Come now, you who say, Today or tomorrow we will go into this or that city and spend a year there, and do business and make a profit." This verse begins with the words "Come now." James uses this expression a second time in 5:1, where he speaks to the rich. What does the expression, "come now," mean? It may be an idiom somewhat equivalent to saying, "Listen to me."

In reading verse 13 we need to pay attention to the word "will." Fighting for fleshly pleasures (v. 1), making friendship with the world (v. 4), speaking against a brother, that is, judging the law (v. 11), going to do business according to one's own will, and boasting in arrogance (v. 16) are all signs of the ungodly and presumptuous confidence of a God-forgetting person. James taught all this based, probably, upon his view concerning practical Christian perfection.

Once again, I would like to point out the contrast between James' emphasis on practical Christian perfection and Paul's emphasis in his Epistles concerning the experience of Christ for the producing of the church. If we have a clear view of this comparison, we shall see the need to go on from the human level, stressed in the book of James, to the divine level, stressed in the Epistles of Paul. On the divine level we know Christ, experience Christ, and possess Christ for the building up of the church, His body, as His expression. I hope that the book of James will help us to see this contrast.

In verses 14 and 15 James continues, "You who do not know what your life will be tomorrow; for you are a vapor, appearing for a little while, and then disappearing--instead of your saying, If the Lord wills, we will both live

and

do

this or that." James' word here again sounds somewhat like the tone of the Old Testament (see Psa. 90:3-10). In any case, his word arouses a fear of one's self-will and a confidence in God, as expressed in verse 15.

In 4:16 and 17 James concludes, "But now you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin." The word "arrogance" in verse 16 also means pretentiousness, vainglory.

The word "therefore" in verse 17 indicates that this verse is a concluding word to all the charges in the preceding verses. This concluding word indicates that if the recipients have been helped by James' writing and yet will not do as he has written, to them it is sin.

A MAXIM

Many Christians treasure 4:13-17, especially James' word in verses 14 and 15. In verse 14 James says, "You are a vapor, appearing for a little while, and then disappearing." This statement may be considered a proverb. Then in verse 15 James encourages us to say, "If the Lord wills, we will both live and do this or that." Here James is saying that instead of declaring that today or tomorrow we will go to a certain place, spend time there, do business, and make a profit, we should simply say, "If the Lord wills...."

The word of James in verse 15 sounds very much like a maxim. When I was young, I had the thought of making a sign with this maxim on it to remind me always to say, "If the Lord wills." Although I still appreciate this saying, I can recognize that it has an Old Testament tone.

Christians sometimes use this verse in writing letters, saying that they will go to a certain place or do a particular thing "if the Lord wills." I know from experience that this clause can be a protection to us. For example, I may be invited to a certain place and accept the invitation. But in my letter of acceptance I may add the clause "if the Lord wills." This protects me in the sense that if eventually I am not able to go to there as planned, I cannot

be condemned by others for not coming. Therefore, to say "If the Lord wills" can be a protection.

LED BY THE SPIRIT

What James says in these verses is different in tone from what is found elsewhere in the New Testament, especially in the writings of Paul. Perhaps you can think of certain verses written by Paul that are similar to James' word in 4:15. Nevertheless, the basic tone of Paul's writing is different, for he charges us to walk according to the Spirit. For example, in Galatians 5:16 Paul says, "But I say, walk by the Spirit and you shall by no means fulfill the lust of the flesh." Then in Galatians 5:25 Paul goes on to say, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit." Furthermore, in Romans 8:4 Paul tells us that "the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to flesh, but according to spirit."

In the book of Acts we see that Paul was led by the Spirit and walked in spirit. Acts 16:6 says that they were "forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia." Then verse 7 says that the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to go into Bithynia. Here we see that when Paul was traveling for the preaching of the gospel, he was restrained and directed by the Spirit. On other occasions Paul was stirred in his spirit (Acts 17:16), was pressed in the spirit (Acts 18:5), and purposed in spirit (Acts 19:21).

To say, "If the Lord wills," is rather objective and is quite much according to the tone of the Old Testament. But to be led of the Spirit, to walk in the Spirit, and to do what our spirit constrains us to do are subjective and are much more according to the New Testament.

I certainly have no intention of belittling James or his Epistle. However, I must truthfully point out that after many years studying this book, I have learned that this Epistle is very Jewish and has a strong color, tone, taste, and atmosphere of the Old Testament. If we did not have the fourteen Epistles of Paul, we might be influenced by the book of James to go back to Judaism. Although we

appreciate and need James' emphasis on practical Christian perfection, we still need to be very clear that much of his Epistle has the tone, color, and atmosphere of the Old Testament.

LIFE-STUDY OF JAMES

MESSAGE ELEVEN

PRACTICAL VIRTUES OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

(11)

Scripture Reading: James 5:1-11

A WORD TO THE RICH

In this message we shall consider 5:1-11. Verses 1 through 6 may be regarded as a parenthetical section, and this section may be addressed, according to its contents, to the rich class among the Jews in general, since James regarded his recipients as the twelve tribes of the Jews (1:1). In 5:1 James says to the rich, "Come now, you rich, weep, howling over your miseries which are coming upon you!"

In verses 2 and 3 James says of the rich that their riches have rotted, their garments have become moth-eaten, their gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be a testimony against them and eat their flesh like fire. Then in verse 4 he goes on to say, "Behold, the wages of the workmen who mowed your fields, which has been withheld by you, cries out, and the cries of those who reaped, have entered into the ears of the Lord of hosts." As in Romans 9:29, "Lord of hosts" is the equivalent of the divine title in Hebrew, *Jehovah-Sabaoth*, which means Jehovah of hosts, Jehovah of armies (1 Sam. 1:3). Such a title bears a Jewish character, color, tone, and flavor. This is a further confirmation of the fact that James still cared very much for Jewish things.

In verse 5 James goes on to say, "You have lived luxuriously on the earth and lived in self-indulgence; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter." Here "fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter" indicates that they satiated their gluttonous desire in indulgence, even in

a day of slaughter (Jer. 12:3), that is, in a day of judgment, when they were to be slaughtered as animals by God's judgment. This implies that they were in a stupor, unaware of their coming miseries, their miserable destiny (5:1).

In verse 6 James says, "You condemned, you murdered the righteous; he does not resist you." In this verse "the righteous" is in the collective singular with the article used for the class. It does not refer directly to any individual, but pictures the death of the Lord Jesus, who is the Righteous (Acts 7:52; 3:14).

It is difficult to say to whom 5:1-6 is addressed. There is some disagreement among Bible teachers concerning this point. It is rather certain that these verses were not addressed merely to believers. I believe that 5:1-6 is addressed to the Jewish people in a general way.

This understanding is confirmed by the fact that according to 1:1, this Epistle is addressed to "the twelve tribes in the dispersion." James' concept probably was that the Jewish believers were to be regarded as still among the Jewish people. Therefore, he addressed his Epistle to the Jewish believers but also to all the Jews. This may help us to understand why James addressed this Epistle to the twelve tribes.

If the Epistle of James is addressed both to Jewish believers and to Jewish people in general, this may help us understand what James says in chapter four about wars, fightings, and murder (vv. 1-2). Among the Jews there probably were fightings and even murders. This may mean that in 4:1-2 James speaks concerning fightings among the Jews that originated with their lusts.

As a whole, James' writing is somewhat ambiguous. Because he was under the thick cloud of Judaic concepts, his view was not clear. Furthermore, at least to some extent James was sympathetic with Judaism. On the one hand, his Epistle touches New Testament concepts; on the other hand, in this Epistle James still keeps certain Old Testament concepts. Hence, his writing is a mixture. As we have pointed out, the title Lord of hosts in 5:4 points to the Jewish character of this book.

AWAITING THE LORD'S COMING WITH LONGSUFFERING

After the parenthetical section in 5:1-6, we have a word concerning awaiting the Lord's coming with longsuffering (5:7-11). This also is a practical virtue of Christian perfection.

Awaiting the Lord's coming back is not an Old Testament matter. Rather, this is fully a New Testament matter. This indicates that after speaking to Jews in 5:1-6, James now speaks to Christians, to believers, in 5:7-11. First he talks to the rich among the Jews, and then he speaks to Christians about waiting for the Lord's coming back. I find it difficult to believe that James could write in this way. Nevertheless, this is what we find in 5:1-11.

In 5:7 James says, "Therefore, be longsuffering, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer awaits the precious fruit of the earth, being longsuffering over it until it receives the early and late rain." The Greek words for longsuffering in these verses are *makrothumia* (noun, as in Heb. 6:12; Rom. 2:4; 2 Tim. 4:2; 1 Pet. 3:20) and *makrothumeo*, as in James 5:7-8. Longsuffering expresses patience toward persons, as toward those who persecuted the prophets (v. 10).

The Greek word for "coming" in 5:7 is *parousia*, presence. Christ's coming will be His presence with His believers. This *parousia* will begin with His coming to the air and end with His coming to the earth. Within His *parousia*, there will be the rapture of the majority of the believers to the air (1 Thes. 4:15-17), the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10), and the marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-9).

In verse 8 James continues, "You also be longsuffering; establish your hearts, because the coming of the Lord has drawn near." While we are awaiting the Lord's coming with longsuffering, He, as the real Farmer (Matt. 13:3), is also awaiting with patience our maturity in life as the firstfruit and harvest of His field (Rev. 14:4, 14-15). Our maturity in life can cut short the period of our longsuffering and His patience.

Verse 9 says, "Do not complain, brothers, against one

another, that you be not judged; behold, the Judge stands before the doors!" This verse indicates that the Lord will come back not only as the Bridegroom to meet the bride (Matt. 25:1, 6; Rev. 19:7-8), but also as the Judge to judge all peoples. First, the Lord will judge His believers at His judgment seat (1 Cor. 4:4-5; 2 Cor. 5:10). We need to pursue maturity in life to meet the Lord and be prepared to be judged by Him.

In verse 10 James continues, "Take as an example, brothers, of suffering evil and of longsuffering, the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord." This is a further development of verses 7 and 8 concerning the suffering and longsuffering of the faithful believers. James uses the prophets as an example. The prophets spoke in the name of the Lord. Speaking in the name of the Lord indicates that the prophets were one with the Lord. Hence, their suffering and longsuffering were with the Lord and for the Lord. The suffering and longsuffering of the faithful believers should be the same.

In verse 11 James says, "Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very compassionate and full of pity." In this verse "endured" and "endurance" are translations of the Greek words *hupomeno*, verb, and *hupomone*, noun, as in Romans 5:3 and 2 Corinthians 1:6. This endurance expresses patience toward things, such as the things which afflicted Job.

Our Need to Grow in Life

In 5:7 James uses the illustration of a farmer awaiting with longsuffering the precious fruit of the earth. We have seen that the Lord Jesus is actually the real Farmer, the unique Farmer. As we are awaiting His coming, He, as the real Farmer, is awaiting our maturity. We may pray, "Lord, come back quickly." However, He may say, "My children, mature quicker. While you are awaiting My coming back, I am awaiting your maturity. Do you know why it has been nearly two thousand years and I have not yet come back? The reason is that My people are not yet

matured. Only your maturity can hasten My coming back. You exercise your longsuffering, and I exercise My longsuffering."

It is a great help for us to realize that if we are serious about awaiting the Lord's coming back, we need to grow in life. Most Christians today view the Lord's coming in an altogether objective way, in a way that has nothing to do with our spiritual condition or spiritual growth. Their expectation is that one day the Lord will suddenly come, and that His coming will have nothing to do with their maturity. It may be that the concepts many Christians hold regarding the Lord's coming back are actually causing Him to delay His coming.

The illustration of the farmer in 5:7 implies that the farmer is waiting for the crop growing in the field to ripen. According to Revelation 14, the Lord is also waiting for the harvest to be ripe. When the harvest in the field is ripe, He will come back. This harvest will be the issue, the outcome, of the Lord's sowing of Himself as a seed. This was accomplished during the Lord's first coming, and it is described in Matthew 13. We need to realize that it is the ripening of the harvest that will hasten the Lord's coming back.

Longsuffering and Endurance

In these verses James speaks both of longsuffering and endurance. He uses the prophets as an example of longsuffering and Job as an example of endurance. How shall we differentiate longsuffering and endurance? After much study I have concluded that longsuffering is a matter of patience toward persons. When we are persecuted, we need longsuffering. Therefore, longsuffering is an expression of our patience toward people. The prophets were persecuted, but they were longsuffering toward their persecutors. Endurance, on the contrary, is an expression of our patience toward the things that afflict us. Therefore, when Job suffered affliction, he displayed endurance. Job's suffering was not that of persecution but that of calamities.

In his writing James uses the Greek words for long-suffering and endurance. While we are awaiting the Lord's coming back, we need both longsuffering and endurance because we face suffering from two sources. These sources are persons who persecute us and the environment that afflicts us. For example, a brother may have an accident, and his new car may be damaged. For that, he does not need longsuffering; he needs endurance. The car has not done anything to persecute him, but he does suffer from a particular environmental affliction. For that affliction he needs endurance. However, if this brother is mistreated by his boss, he will need longsuffering toward his boss. But if he loses his job, suffering as a result of that environmental affliction, he will once again need endurance. We need to exercise longsuffering toward people and endurance toward environmental afflictions.

For the Lord's coming back, we need longsuffering, endurance, and the growth in life. As we are exercising longsuffering toward those who persecute us and endurance toward afflictions, we need to grow in life. Then we shall be able to say, "O Lord Jesus, come back sooner. Lord, can't You see that I am growing in life? Today I am growing faster than yesterday. Because I am growing, Lord, I ask You to speed up Your coming back." Have you ever prayed like this? I doubt that many Christians have prayed in this way concerning the Lord's coming back.

We need to realize that the Lord's coming is related to our growth in life. If we fulfill the condition of growing in life, the Lord will fulfill the condition of coming back sooner. Therefore, we need to grow in life, and as we are growing, to exercise longsuffering and endurance. This is the proper way to await the Lord's coming back.

The Lord's *Parousia*

Earlier in this message we pointed out that the Greek word for "coming" in 5:7 and 8 is *parousia*, which means presence. The Lord's *parousia* will last for a period of time, at least three and a half years, the length of the great tribulation. The *parousia* is likely to begin a little earlier

than the tribulation, and it may conclude a little before the end of the great tribulation. It is very difficult for us to know when this will be, because the Lord Jesus has said that only the Father knows the time of His coming. This means that the time of the beginning of the Lord's *parousia* is a secret kept confidential in the Father's heart. But according to the study of prophecy in the Scriptures, we can say that the *parousia* will begin a little earlier than the start of the great tribulation.

Most Christians do not understand the Lord's coming as being a matter of the *parousia*, His presence over a period of time. Instead, many believers think that the coming of the Lord will be somewhat like an accident. Actually, the Lord's *parousia* will last for a period of time. According to James' word, we need to await the coming of the Lord, His *parousia*, with longsuffering and endurance. Furthermore, as we are waiting we need to grow in life unto maturity.

LIFE-STUDY OF JAMES

MESSAGE TWELVE

PRACTICAL VIRTUES OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

(12)

Scripture Reading: James 5:12-20

In this message we shall consider the last two sections of the Epistle of James: speaking honestly without swearing (5:12) and healthy practices in the church life (5:13-20).

SPEAKING HONESTLY WITHOUT SWEARING

In 5:12 James says, "But above all things, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth, or with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no be no, that you do not fall under judgment." We should not swear, because we are nothing, and nothing is under our control or up to us (Matt. 5:34-36). To swear displays the acting of our self-will and our forgetfulness of God. But to let our yes be yes and our no be no is to act according to the divine nature we have received through regeneration, in the consciousness of the presence of God, with the denial of our self-will and sinful nature.

What James says in this verse reminds us of the word of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 5:37: "But let your word be, Yes, yes; No, no; for whatever is more than this is of the evil one." Here the Lord is saying that our word should be simple and true: "Yes, yes; No, no." We should not try to convince others with many words.

In 5:12 James says that if our yes is yes and our no is no, we shall not fall under judgment. Our genuine faithfulness and sincerity in our words according to the divine nature we partake of will keep us from God's judgment.

Once again, James' word about judgment reminds us of a word spoken by the Lord Jesus. In Matthew 12:36 and 37 the Lord says, "I say to you that every idle word which men shall speak, they shall render account concerning it in the day of judgment; for by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be convicted." The Greek word for "idle" is *argos*, composed of two words: *a* meaning not, and *ergon* meaning work. An idle word is a non-working word, an inoperative word, having no positive function, useless, unprofitable, unfruitful, and barren. In the day of judgment those who speak such words will render account concerning every one of them. Because this is the case, how much more must we account for every wicked word! In Matthew 5:37 the Lord gives us a serious warning. This warning indicates to us that we must learn to control and restrict our speaking.

What James says in 5:12 fits in with the subject of this Epistle--practical Christian perfection. Our way of speaking has much to do with this. Speaking honestly and with restraint is a virtue of Christian perfection. But if we are loose in our speaking, we will fall short of much perfection. Therefore, after telling us not to swear, James says that our yes should be yes and our no should be no, so that we may not fall under judgment.

As a godly man, James could never forget the coming judgment, and he lived under this judgment. I hope that we all shall have the understanding that whatever we do will be judged. For example, our talk on the telephone will be judged by the Lord. When some sisters are on the telephone, they talk without any restraint. Apparently, they do not realize that whatever they say will one day be judged according to the Lord's word in Matthew 12:36-37.

Concerning swearing and unrestrained speaking, James was serious. However, certain believers are not serious regarding these things. To them, it seems that there will not be any judgment. They may have the concept that once they have been saved from eternal perdition, there will be no more problems. But we know according to the New Testament that all believers will have to give an

account to the Lord at His judgment seat.

What was on James' heart as he was writing this Epistle was the matter of practical Christian perfection. Because of his concern for Christian perfection, he says in 5:12, "Above all things, my brothers, do not swear." After saying so much about the tongue in chapter three, he gives such a word about swearing in 5:12.

Anyone who swears is not an honest person. He who swears is a liar. Anyone who is honest has no need to swear. The reason we Christians should not swear is that we are honest. Anyone who swears is a person who is pretending, and his swearing is a sign that he is not honest. Swearing, therefore, is a sign of pretense.

The basic reason for not swearing, however, is that nothing is under our control. Neither heaven nor earth is ours. Actually, we do not even belong to ourselves, and we cannot control anything. Because nothing is under our control, we should not make an oath. Once again we see that our speaking needs to be restricted.

In 5:12 James indicates that we should not speak excessively. Unnecessary talk always causes trouble. If we speak carelessly, we may exaggerate and not be honest. But if our speaking is restrained, we can exercise ourselves to speak honestly.

HEALTHY PRACTICES IN THE CHURCH LIFE

Praying

In 5:13 James goes on to the matter of healthy practices in the church life: "Does anyone among you suffer evil? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise." Praying brings us the strength of the Lord to endure suffering, and singing praise keeps us in the joy of the Lord. The Greek words rendered "sing praise" also mean sing psalms, or play on a stringed instrument. Whether we pray or sing praise, we should contact God. In any environment and under any circumstance, humble or exalted, grievous or joyful, we need to contact the Lord.

In verse 14 James continues, "Is anyone among you weak? Let him call to him the elders of the church, and let

them pray over him, having anointed him with oil in the name of the Lord." In this verse James refers to someone who is weak because of sickness. Weakness leads to sickness (1 Cor. 11:30), and sickness causes more weakness.

In verse 14 James encourages the one who is weak to call the elders of the church. To call the elders of the church to pray for weakness due to sickness implies that there is no problem between the calling one and the church represented by the elders; that restitution has been made between the calling one and the church, if the sickness is due to the calling one's having offended the church (see 1 Cor. 11:29-32); and that there has been a thorough confession of sins one to another by the sick one and the elders (James 5:16).

Anointing with Oil in the Name of the Lord

In verse 14 James speaks of anointing with oil in the name of the Lord. Two Greek words are translated anoint: *aleipho*, the word used here and in John 12:3, is the common term for applying oil: *chrío* means to anoint officially for office as priest (Acts 10:38), king (Heb. 1:9), or prophet (Luke 4:18). *Chrío* in connection with *Christos* (Christ) is used for the anointing of the Son by the Father (Acts 10:38). To anoint with oil signifies to impart the Spirit of life, who has been poured upon the Body of Christ as the anointing oil (Psa. 133:2), to the sick member of the Body, through the representation of the elders of the church, for the healing of the sick one (1 John 5:16).

"In the name of the Lord" signifies oneness with the Lord. The anointing in 5:14 is not by elders alone, but by their being one with the Lord, representing both the Body and the Head.

In verse 14 we have the only direct mention of the church in the book of James. The one time James speaks of the church is in reference to the negative matter of healing sickness. Furthermore, the matter of turning back a brother who has been led astray from the truth is also a

matter related to the church life. Hence, what James says concerning the church involves negative matters, praying for the sick and restoring backsliders.

James' concept was filled with the things of Judaism and not much with the things concerning the church. In contrast to James, Paul was permeated, saturated, and soaked with the matters of the church. Again and again in his writings, he speaks regarding the church. In his Epistles Paul writes concerning Christ, the Spirit, life, and the church in a profound way. But in this Epistle James has little to say about Christ, the Spirit, life, or the church. Although we appreciate James' emphasis on practical Christian perfection, we must go on through the help of Paul's ministry concerning God's economy to see that the church is built up with the riches of the all-inclusive Christ.

The Prayer of Faith

In 5:15 James goes on to say, "And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, it will be forgiven him." The Greek word rendered "prayer" is not the usual form of the word for prayer. This word is translated vow in Acts 18:18 and 21:23.

In verse 15 James mentions both sickness and sins. Committing sins is often the cause of sickness (John 5:14). In such cases forgiveness is always the cause of healing (Matt. 9:2, 5-7; Mark 2:5). For this reason, in the first part of verse 16 James says, "Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed."

Praying in a Prayer

In 5:16b-18 James says, "An operating petition of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man of like feeling with us, and in prayer he prayed that it should not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave

rain, and the earth brought forth its fruit." The words "in prayer he prayed" indicate that a prayer from the Lord was given to Elijah, in which he prayed. He did not pray in his feeling, thought, intention, mood, or in any kind of motivation from circumstances or situations for the fulfilling of his own purpose. He prayed in the prayer given him by the Lord for the accomplishing of His will.

In verse 16 James speaks of the operating petition of a righteous man. This indicates that in praying for the sick, we need to pray in the way of an operating petition. This means that we should not pray without a burden. Rather, we need to pray as Elijah prayed.

In verse 17 James says that in prayer Elijah prayed that it should not rain. In other words, Elijah prayed in a prayer. The King James Version says that Elijah prayed earnestly. However, to pray in a prayer actually does not mean to pray earnestly. James does not tell us that Elijah prayed in earnestness; he says that Elijah prayed in a prayer.

What is the meaning of this expression, to pray in a prayer? The prayer that Elijah prayed was great, for he prayed that it would not rain on earth for three years and six months. This is much greater than praying for the healing of a sick person. After three and a half years, Elijah prayed again, this time praying that heaven would give rain. Elijah could pray in this way because God gave him a prayer, because God burdened him with a prayer. In other words, Elijah had the burden to pray in a particular way, and that burden was a prayer given to him by God.

We should not pray according to our memory, observation, or our own burden. On the contrary, we must have a burden from God to pray for a certain thing, just as Elijah was burdened with the prayer given to him by God. God gave Elijah a prayer, and in that prayer Elijah prayed. This is not a matter of praying in earnest. It is a matter that God, in His move and according to His plan, gave Elijah a prayer, and Elijah was burdened to pray the prayer that God gave him. Therefore, Elijah prayed in a prayer.

Turning a Sinner Back to the Truth

In 5:19 and 20 James goes on to say, "My brothers, if anyone among you is led astray from the truth and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner back from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins." This may imply that the sick one in verse 14 was led astray from the truth and needed to be turned back.

According to the context of these two verses, the sinner in verse 20 is not an unbelieving sinner but a believing brother who has been led astray from the truth and is turned back from his error to the truth. Hence, the salvation of his soul does not refer to the eternal salvation of the person, but refers to the dispensational salvation of his soul from the suffering of physical death under God's discipline.

First Peter 1:5 and Hebrews 10:39 are also related to the saving of the soul. The salvation in 1 Peter 1:5 is not salvation from eternal perdition, but salvation of our souls from the dispensational punishment of the Lord's governmental dealing. Hebrews 10:39 speaks of the gaining of the soul. At the time we believed in the Lord Jesus and were saved, our spirit was regenerated with the Spirit of God (John 3:6). But we must wait until the Lord Jesus comes back for our body to be redeemed, saved, and transfigured (Rom. 8:23-25; Phil. 3:21). As to the saving, or gaining, of our soul, it depends upon how we deal with it in following the Lord after we are saved and regenerated. If we would lose it now for the Lord's sake, we shall save it (Matt. 16:25; Luke 9:24; 17:33; John 12:25; 1 Pet. 1:9), and it will be saved, or gained, at the Lord's coming back. This will be a reward to the overcoming followers of the Lord (Matt. 16:22-28).

In 1:21 James speaks of the saving of our souls. The salvation of our souls, according to the context of that chapter, implies the endurance of environmental trials (vv. 2-12) and the resisting of lustful temptation (vv. 13-21). James' view concerning the salvation of our soul is somewhat negative and not as positive as that of Paul who

says that our soul can be transformed by the renewing Spirit even to the image of the Lord from glory to glory (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23; 2 Cor. 3:18).

In 5:20 the saving of the soul from death is not a matter of salvation from eternal perdition. Rather, it is a matter of dispensational discipline by physical death (1 John 5:16). In verse 20 "from death" should equal "raise...up" in verse 15.

In verse 20 James says that the one who saves a soul from death will also cover a multitude of sins. "Cover a multitude of sins" is an Old Testament expression (Psa. 32:1; 85:2; Prov. 10:12) used by James to indicate that to turn an erring brother back is to cover his sins so that he is not condemned. "Cover...sins" should equal "sins...forgiven" in verse 15, as in Psalm 32:1 and 85:2. The sins in 5:20 are the sins committed by the erring brother, which brought forth death to him (1:15).

Some writers have suggested that in 5:19 and 20 James is talking about the salvation of a lost sinner. They claim that the sinner here is a lost one, that the saving of the soul is a matter of soul-winning, and that death equals eternal death, that is, eternal perdition. This interpretation is not correct. In verse 19 James is speaking to brothers and concerning anyone among the brothers who may be led astray from the truth and then turned back to the truth. This indicates that such a one formerly was in the truth. If he had not been in the truth, how could he have been led astray from the truth? Since he has been led astray from the truth, he must have previously been in the truth. Furthermore, verse 20 speaks of a sinner being turned back from the error of his way. This also indicates that once he was in the truth, that he has been led astray from the truth, and that now he is returning to the truth. Certainly this does not refer to an unsaved sinner. Yes, in verse 20 James uses the word "sinner," because in the sight of God a misled believer is temporarily a sinner. His being led astray is a matter of sinning. Hence, because he has been led astray, he becomes a sinner for the time being. Therefore, to bring him back to the truth is to bring

a sinner back to the truth. This sinner, therefore, is a backslidden brother.

Saving a Soul from Death

In 5:20 James also says that the one who turns such a sinner, such a backslidden brother, will save his soul from death. We need to pay attention to the fact that James does not say "save him," but says, "save his soul." We need to differentiate "saving him" from "saving his soul." What we have in verse 20 is a matter of the salvation of the soul.

In this Epistle James has already spoken concerning the salvation of the soul. In 1:21 James says, "Wherefore, putting away all filthiness and abundance of malice, receive in meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." Saving the soul is not a matter of initial salvation; it is a matter of the progressing stage of salvation, the stage of transformation (see note 5⁵ in 1 Peter 1). Those who have been saved initially need to receive more of the word that can save their souls. Hence, according to 1:21, after our initial salvation we still need a further salvation, the salvation of our soul.

The saving of the soul in 5:20 is not related to saving the person from eternal perdition; it is to save his soul from a certain kind of suffering. According to 1 John 5, sin may cause one's physical death because of God's discipline. A believer may sin and then be warned by God. If he ignores this warning and continues in sin, God may discipline him and allow him to become sick. This sickness is a discipline and also a warning to repent, forsake that sin, and give up a life of sinning. If this believer does not repent, God may discipline him further to the extent that He cuts short his physical life. As a result, this believer dies.

The fact that a believer may die as the result of sin does not mean that he will perish eternally. Once we have been saved, we are saved eternally. On the day we believed in the Lord Jesus we were saved once for all, and we shall never be lost. However, if a believer remains in a life of sin, he may be warned and disciplined by God through sickness. First, God may discipline him with

sickness

as

a

warning to come back to the truth. Then the church may have someone try to bring this person back. But if this one remains in sin, this may force God to exercise further discipline and allow him to die.

Suppose you are burdened to turn a misled believer back to the truth. To turn him back is to save his soul from physical death. This is the proper interpretation of 5:19-20.

What James says in these verses has nothing to do with eternal perdition or eternal salvation. The question of eternal salvation was fully resolved at the time we believed and were saved. Nevertheless, if we are led astray and go back to sin, we may suffer sickness as God's discipline. If we do not repent, we may suffer an early death.

When someone dies, it is the soul, and not the body, that especially suffers. Physical death is a very real suffering to the soul. To be saved in our soul from such suffering is to be brought back to the truth. This is what it means to bring back a backsliding believer and thereby save his soul from physical death.

What James describes in these verses is part of the church life. However, it is a negative aspect of the church life. In this Epistle we cannot find positive things covered by James with respect to the church life. Although what James says concerning the church life is on the negative side, we can still receive much positive help from what he has written in this book. In particular, we can receive help concerning practical Christian perfection.

LIFE-STUDY OF JAMES

MESSAGE THIRTEEN

A LIFE NOT FULLY ACCORDING TO AND FOR GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

(1)

Scripture Reading: James 1:1, 17-18, 21, 25; 2:2, 9-10;
3:13, 17; 4:4-5

In the Gospel of Mark we see a life--the life of the Lord Jesus--that is fully according to and for God's New Testament economy. By contrast, in the Epistle of James we see a life that is not fully according to and for God's New Testament economy. In this message and in the message following we shall consider a number of points in the book of James that indicate a mixture of the New Testament economy with the Old Testament dispensation.

James was a very godly man, and, humanly speaking, he was quite wise. But in instance after instance we see that James was occupied too much with Old Testament matters. No doubt, he was saturated, soaked, with the feeling, flavor, and atmosphere of the Old Testament. We cannot find a strong indication with James that he passed through the Old Testament dispensation fully into the New Testament economy. Probably James had been baptized. However, according to his writings, I do not believe that he ever experienced a thorough termination and burial of himself along with all the things of the past, both good and bad.

STILL KEEPING THE TWELVE TRIBES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT DISPENSATION

In his Epistle James still keeps the twelve tribes of the Old Testament dispensation. This is indicated by the way

James begins this book: "James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the dispersion (1:1)." The fact that James addresses his Epistle to the twelve tribes in the dispersion may indicate the lack of a clear view concerning the distinction between Christians and Jews, between God's New Testament economy and the Old Testament dispensation. James may not have been clear that God in the New Testament has delivered and separated the Jewish believers in Christ from the Jewish nation. Therefore, the expression "twelve tribes" in 1:1 is too old; it is something of the Old Testament dispensation.

According to Paul's writings, the Jewish believers in Christ have been called by God out of the old dispensation. In the book of Galatians Paul even regards Judaism as the present evil age: "Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might rescue us out of the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father (1:4)." According to the context of the entire book of Galatians, the present evil age in Galatians 1:4 refers to the religious world, the religious course of the world, the Jewish religion. This is confirmed by Galatians 6:14-15, where circumcision is considered a part of the world, the religious world, which is crucified to the Apostle Paul. Therefore, Paul indicates in the book of Galatians that Christ gave Himself for our sins in order to rescue us out of the Jewish religious world, the present evil age.

The present evil age in Galatians 1:4 is equal to the "perverse generation" in Acts 2:40. On the day of Pentecost Peter told the people to be saved from this perverse generation. How, then, could such a godly person as James address his Epistle, which was written to Christian Jews, to the twelve tribes in the dispersion? This certainly was contrary to God's New Testament economy.

POSSESSING THE DIVINE LIFE THROUGH THE DIVINE BIRTH

In 1:17 and 18 James says, "All good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the lights, with whom is no variableness or shadow cast by

turning. Having purposed, He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a certain firstfruit of His creatures." These verses indicate that the Father of lights brought us forth to be the firstfruit of His creatures. This refers to the divine birth, our regeneration (John 3:5-6), which is carried out according to God's eternal purpose. The fact that we have been brought forth by the word of truth means that the word is the seed of life, by which we have been regenerated (1 Pet. 1:23). Therefore, James indicates that we possess the divine life through the divine birth.

On the one hand, James addresses his Epistle to the twelve tribes. On the other hand, he speaks regarding the divine life received through the divine birth. The twelve tribes are something altogether of the Old Testament, whereas the divine life received through the divine birth is certainly a matter of the New Testament. What a mixture there is in the writing of James! He mixes the Old Testament with the New Testament. How could those regenerated by God, begotten of Him, still be addressed as the twelve tribes? How could James speak to the twelve tribes and then say that God has brought them forth to be a certain firstfruit of His creatures? Nevertheless, this is what James did in this book. How could the twelve tribes be brought forth by God to be a certain firstfruit? When we compare 1:1 with 1:17 and 18, we see how cloudy was the situation with James, as indicated by this Epistle.

At this point I wish to say that we should not be attracted to a person simply because he is godly. Throughout the centuries, many godly people have been in a cloudy condition with respect to God's economy. They were under a cloud, veiled by their godliness. It is possible for us to be misled by a godly person just as Paul was misled by the godly James in Acts 21. It is not easy to avoid the influence of a situation that is spiritually cloudy.

In Acts 21 Paul took James' suggestion to go to the temple with certain ones who had a vow and to pay the charge for them. We may think that in doing this Paul was broad and acting according to his word to the Corinthians:

"To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order that I might gain Jews; to those under law, as under law (not being myself under law), that I might gain those under law" (1 Cor. 9:20). But in Acts 21 the Lord was not as broad as Paul supposedly was. On the last day of the vow, the seventh day, a disturbance took place, and Paul was arrested. If we read Acts 21 carefully, we shall see that the Lord did not agree with what was happening in Jerusalem, and He came in to deal with it.

RECEIVING THE IMPLANTED WORD

In 1:21 James says, "Wherefore, putting away all filthiness and abundance of malice, receive in meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." In this verse James likens the word of God to a plant of life planted into our being and growing in us to bring forth fruit for the salvation of our souls. This surely is a wonderful matter. However, this also is mixed with Old Testament matters in James' writing.

KEEPING THE PERFECT LAW OF FREEDOM IN THE OLD TESTAMENT PRACTICE

In 1:25 James says, "But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of freedom, and continues in it, not having become a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in his doing." The perfect law, the law of freedom, is an excellent thing. This is the law of life inscribed on our hearts (Heb. 8:10), the moral standard of which corresponds to that of the constitution of the kingdom of the heavens decreed by the Lord on the mount (Matt. 5--7). Although the keeping of the perfect law of freedom is a very positive thing, James speaks of keeping this law in the Old Testament practice. This is indicated by what he says in 1:26 and 27: "If anyone thinks himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue, but deceiving his own heart, this one's religion is vain. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, to keep oneself unspotted from the world." Here we see that James charges the

believers to keep the perfect law of freedom in relation to three things: bridling the tongue, visiting orphans and widows, and keeping oneself unspotted from the world. None of these is a crucial item in God's New Testament economy. By this we see that James does not tell us to keep the perfect law of freedom in the New Testament practice. Rather, by charging us to bridle our tongue, visit orphans and widows, and keep ourselves unspotted from the world, he is speaking of Old Testament practices.

As we read chapter one of his Epistle, we see that James held to the concept of keeping the perfect law. In 1:22 he says that we should become doers of the word and not hearers only. Then in 1:25 he says that the one who looks into the perfect law and continues in it, being a doer of the work, will be blessed in his doing. James is clearly saying that we must be doers of the law. A doer of the law, according to James, is one who keeps the law. However, he does not tell us the New Testament way to keep the perfect law of freedom. The New Testament teaches that we keep the law of freedom by living and walking according to the Spirit. The entire New Testament is not for us to keep by ourselves; it is for us to live by the Spirit so that we may keep it. Merely keeping is a matter of doing by ourselves, whereas living is by the indwelling Spirit who is in our regenerated spirit. Now we do not need to try to keep the law by ourselves, and we do not need to be its doers by our own effort. What we need is a walk according to the Spirit. This means that instead of being those who do by ourselves we should be those who live by the Spirit. There is a great difference between one who keeps the law by himself and one who lives according to the Spirit.

In the Epistle of James there is not much that is according to the concept of the New Testament. Instead, to a large extent, the concept in this Epistle is that of the Old Testament. Yes, James speaks of the law of freedom, but he speaks of it in the Old Testament way of keeping the law of letters. James may have thought that the Mosaic law was not complete, not perfect, but that the New Testament teaching is perfect. James may have realized

that the New Testament teaching is perfect and gives us freedom. Thus, according to James, we need to keep it; we need to be its doers. His concept of how to fulfill the law is not clearly according to the New Testament. His way of handling the law was according to the Old Testament way of keeping and doing by ourselves, not according to the New Testament way of living, walking, behaving, and having our being according to the Spirit.

Some readers of the Epistle of James may think that there is nothing wrong with being a doer of the perfect law. They may say, "James is right in saying that we should be doers of the law. Surely, we all must be doers of the perfect law of freedom." If we read the Bible this way, we read it according to the natural understanding, not according to the enlightenment of the Spirit. Actually, all the New Testament teachings are definitions of the living and the indwelling of the all-inclusive Spirit within us. To try to keep these teachings or to do them by ourselves is not our need; our need is to walk according to and by the indwelling Spirit. When we walk according to and by the Spirit, we live the perfect law, the law of freedom; we live the entire New Testament. We do not keep the New Testament by our own effort; we live by the Spirit that we may keep it. Doing is something that is of ourselves, but living is by the Holy Spirit. This is the reason Paul says in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." The New Testament concept is this: no longer I, but Christ lives in me. The Epistle of James is not clear in this matter. James knew that we have been born of God, that God has brought us forth by the word of truth. Nevertheless, his concept concerning the living of God's people, and in particular concerning practical Christian perfection, seems to be based on the concept of the Old Testament.

MIXING THE NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY WITH THE PRACTICE OF THE RECOVERED OLD TESTAMENT DISPENSATION

James mixed the practice of the New Testament

economy with that of the recovered Old Testament dispensation. This is indicated by his use of the word "synagogue" in 2:2. We have seen that the Greek word *synagogue* is composed of two words: *sun*, together and *ago*, to bring; hence, a collecting, gathering, congregation, assembly. It came to denote the place of gathering and was used in the New Testament to denote the congregation (Acts 13:43; 9:2; Luke 12:11) and congregating place (Luke 7:5) of the Jews. In Jerusalem there were quite a few synagogues of various kinds of Jews (Acts 6:9).

Synagogues did not exist before the Babylonian captivity of the children of Israel. After the temple was destroyed, the synagogues were formed. The Jews came to the synagogue seeking the knowledge of God by studying the Holy Scriptures (Luke 4:16-17; Acts 13:14-15). When the Jews returned from captivity, they brought back to their own country this practice of meeting in synagogues. This was a practice of the recovered Old Testament dispensation after the Jews had been recovered from Babylon. In Jerusalem there were synagogues for Jews who had returned from different areas and had their own languages and customs. After they came back to Jerusalem, they established synagogues according to these languages and customs. This was the reason there were different synagogues among the Jews in Jerusalem.

In 2:1 and 2a James says, "My brothers, do not have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory with respect of persons. For if there comes into your synagogue..." In 2:1 James speaks of the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in verse 2, of the synagogue. This clearly indicates a mixture of God's New Testament economy with the practice of the Old Testament dispensation after the recovery from Babylon. Apparently, James did not have any concept concerning the distinction between Christians and Jews. As used by James, the word synagogue may indicate that he regarded the assembly and assembling place of the Jewish believers as one of the synagogues among the Jews, perhaps a Christian synagogue. This may indicate that he considered the Jewish Christians still as a part of the

Jewish nation, as the chosen people of God according to the Old Testament. If so, this indicates that he lacked a clear vision concerning the distinction between God's chosen people of the Old Testament and the believers in Christ of the New Testament. What a serious mixture this is!

STILL KEEPING THE OLD TESTAMENT LAW OF LETTERS

In chapters two and four of his Epistle we see that James still kept the Old Testament law of letters. For example in 2:9 and 10 he says, "But if you respect persons, you commit sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law, yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all." This word indicates that James still practiced the keeping of the Old Testament law. This corresponds to the word in Acts 21:20, spoken by James and the elders in Jerusalem to Paul. Many thousands of Jewish believers still remained in a mixture of the Christian faith and the Mosaic law. James and the others even advised Paul to practice such a semi-Judaic mixture (Acts 21:17-26). In Acts 21 James encouraged Paul to keep the law. He was not aware that the dispensation of law was over and the dispensation of grace should be fully honored, and that any disregard of the distinction between these dispensations was against God's dispensational administration and would be a great damage to God's economical plan for the building up of the church as the expression of Christ. Thus, James' Epistle was written under the cloud of a semi-Judaic mixture.

BEHAVING BY THE WISDOM WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT FLAVOR

In his Epistle James emphasizes the importance of wisdom. In 1:5 he says, "But if anyone of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and does not reproach, and it will be given to him." James realized that the wisdom of God is needed for practical Christian perfection. In 3:13 James speaks concerning the meekness of wisdom: "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by his good manner of life his works in

meekness of wisdom." According to the context of chapter three, meekness of wisdom refers to restraint in speaking. In 3:17 James goes on to talk of the wisdom from above, saying, "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, forbearing, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, unfeigned." This wisdom includes the meekness in verse 13 and the human virtues mentioned in verse 17, all of which are characteristics of practical Christian perfection according to James' view.

What James says about wisdom has an Old Testament flavor. According to James' understanding, the wisdom that is from above may have been much like the wisdom given by God to Solomon. Solomon's wisdom did not come from below, from the world, from Egypt; his wisdom came from above, from God.

The kind of wisdom James talks about is wisdom for human behavior. This wisdom has an Old Testament flavor, and it has nothing to do with New Testament wisdom. In the New Testament the wisdom of God is a matter of living Christ, of having Christ as everything. In 1 Corinthians 1:30 Paul says that Christ has been made wisdom to us from God. Furthermore, the New Testament wisdom of God is not for the building up of our character or Christian perfection; it is for the building up of the church, the Body of Christ. If you read 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, Ephesians 1 and 3, and Colossians 2, you will see what a great difference there is between these two categories of wisdom--the wisdom of the Old Testament for human behavior and the wisdom of the New Testament for having Christ as everything so that the church may be built up.

Many Christians appreciate the type of wisdom found in the book of James. The reason they appreciate this kind of wisdom is that they do not see the crucial matters of Christ as life and the building up of the church. Among today's Christians, few messages are given concerning enjoying Christ as everything so that the church, the Body of Christ, may be built up. Instead, believers have a high regard for the Epistle of James. However, we can see that there is a great discrepancy between the wisdom in the

Epistle of James and the wisdom of God revealed in the Epistles of Paul.

HAVING THE INDWELLING SPIRIT ONLY FOR THE DEALING WITH THE WORLD

In 4:4 and 5 James says, "Adulteresses, do you not know that the friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever determines to be a friend of the world is constituted an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain: The Spirit who dwells in us longs to envy?" This is the only time James mentions God's indwelling Spirit, and this negatively, concerning the abolishing of the friendship of the world, not positively, concerning the living of Christ for the building up of the Body of Christ. Therefore, James does speak of the indwelling Spirit, but he speaks of the Spirit only in relation to dealing with the world.

Concerning the Spirit, there is a great difference between the book of James and the Epistles of Paul. Paul has much to say concerning the indwelling Spirit. For example, in Romans 8 the indwelling Spirit causes us to have life in our spirit, in our mind, and eventually even in our mortal body. In this way the indwelling Spirit causes our tripartite being to be fully saturated with the divine life. Of course, in Galatians 5 Paul also speaks of the striving of the Spirit against the flesh: "The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh" (v. 17). Elsewhere in Galatians Paul speaks of the Spirit of the Son: "Because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba Father!" (4:6). We have received the Spirit of the Son so that Christ may be formed within us (Gal. 4:19). What a great matter it is to have Christ formed in us! Therefore, the Spirit of the Son is not merely for us to overcome the flesh and deal with the world, but is for Christ to be formed within us. Here we see a positive emphasis concerning the Spirit that is not found in the book of James.

LIFE-STUDY OF JAMES

MESSAGE FOURTEEN

A LIFE NOT FULLY ACCORDING TO AND FOR GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

(2)

Scripture Reading: James 4:15; 5:7, 13-20; Acts 21:15-24

In the foregoing message we began to point out how in the Epistle of James we see a life that is not fully according to and for God's New Testament economy. Thus far, we have covered eight characteristics of such a life as found in this book: still keeping the twelve tribes of the Old Testament dispensation, possessing the divine life through the divine birth, receiving the implanted word, keeping the perfect law of freedom in the Old Testament practice, mixing with the practice of the recovered Old Testament dispensation, still keeping the Old Testament law of letter, behaving by the wisdom with the Old Testament flavor, and having the indwelling Spirit only for dealing with the world.

In this message we shall consider some other characteristics of a life that is not fully according to and for God's New Testament economy.

MOVING AS THE OLD TESTAMENT SAINTS

According to 4:15, James would have us say, "If the Lord wills, we will both live and do this or that." Many Christians are fond of verses 13 through 17 of the book of James. In 4:13 James indicates that we should not say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into this or that city and spend a year there, and do business and make a profit." Then in verse 14 James goes on to say, "You who do not know what your life will be tomorrow; for you are a vapor,

appearing for a little while, and then disappearing." Therefore, we should say, "If the Lord wills...." However, this way of living is according to the way of the Old Testament saints. New Testament saints, on the contrary, should be led by the Spirit. In Romans 8:14 Paul says, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." To be led by the Spirit of God is very different from saying that we will do this or that "if the Lord wills." New Testament saints are those who are led by the Spirit in their daily living. Suppose a brother says, "If the Lord so wills, I will love my wife," or a sister says, "If the Lord so wills, I will be in subjection to my husband." This is not the way of the New Testament. Someone who follows the Old Testament way might say, "If the Lord wills, I will go shopping tomorrow. But if the Lord does not so will, what can I do except stay home?" Instead of this, we all must learn in our living to be led by the Spirit. Day by day and even moment by moment, we should be led by the indwelling Spirit.

MIXED WITH THE JEWS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT DISPENSATION

We have seen that in his Epistle James does not seem to make a clear distinction between Christians and Jews, between God's New Testament economy and the Old Testament dispensation. He addresses this Epistle to the twelve tribes (1:1) and even uses the term "synagogue" (2:2) to indicate an assembling place for Jewish Christians. Then in a parenthetical section (5:1-6) James seems to speak to the rich class among the Jews in general. Therefore we say that here we have a mixture with the Jews of the Old Testament dispensation.

AWAITING THE LORD'S COMING BACK WITH THE LONGSUFFERING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS AND THE ENDURANCE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT SAINTS

In 5:7 James says, "Therefore, be longsuffering, brothers, until the coming of the Lord." To await the Lord's

coming with longsuffering is wonderful, and this surely is a New Testament matter. However, in talking about awaiting the Lord's coming back, James did not have the New Testament concept. Instead, he uses the prophets as an example of longsuffering and Job as an example of endurance: "Take as an example, brothers, of suffering evil and of longsuffering, the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very compassionate and full of pity."

James' teaching concerning awaiting the Lord's coming is much different from that of the Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul. In Matthew 24:42 the Lord says, "Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord comes," and in Matthew 24:44 He says, "Therefore, you also, be ready, for the Son of Man comes in an hour that you think not." Here we see that, regarding His coming, the Lord tells us to watch and be ready. Then in Luke 21:36 the Lord gives us this charge: "But be watchful, at every time beseeching." Concerning the Lord's coming, Paul also charges us to watch: "So then, let us not sleep as the rest, but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thes. 5:6).

The prophets and saints of the Old Testament are far removed from us. Today, however, we have the Triune God within. The Old Testament prophets and saints may have had longsuffering and endurance, but today we have the indwelling Triune God to be our endurance and longsuffering as we await the coming of the Lord Jesus.

PRACTICING THE CHURCH LIFE IN THE WAY OF MIXTURE

Praying for a Sick Believer by Anointing Him in the Name of the Lord

In his Epistle James speaks concerning the practice of the church life; however, this practice is in the way of mixture. The first practice related to the church life covered by James in 5:13-20 is that of praying for a sick believer by anointing him in the name of the Lord: "Is

anyone among you weak? Let him call to him the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, having anointed him with oil in the name of the Lord" (v. 14). We must admit that it is wonderful to pray for a sick brother and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.

Praying in the Old Testament Way

Although James says a good word concerning prayer in 5:14-16, his way of praying is that of the Old Testament prophets. This is proved by the fact that he uses the prayer of Elijah as an example: "Elijah was a man of like feeling with us, and in prayer he prayed that it should not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth its fruit" (vv. 17-18). James says that Elijah prayed in a prayer. We may admire this prayer and think that it is excellent. Paul, however, does not speak like this. Rather, Paul tells us to pray always in spirit (Eph. 6:18). To pray in spirit is much better, sweeter, and richer than to pray in a prayer. The latter is to pray in the Old Testament way; the former is to pray in the New Testament way. In the case of Elijah, the Lord gave him a particular prayer as a burden, and Elijah prayed that it would not rain. Hence, Elijah prayed in the prayer given to him by the Lord. But today we have the indwelling Spirit abiding in our spirit and interceding for us (Rom. 8:26), and we do not need a special prayer or burden, for we can pray in our spirit unceasingly (1 Thes. 5:17).

If we do not have light from the Lord, we may highly appreciate what James says concerning prayer. But if we are enlightened by the Lord, we shall see that the way of prayer described by James is the Old Testament way. By this we see that James' writing brings us away from the New Testament practice and back to the Old Testament practice.

Turning Back a Backsliding Brother to Repentance for Forgiveness in the Old Testament Way

In 5:19-20 James speaks of turning back a backsliding

brother to repentance for forgiveness: "My brothers, if anyone among you is led astray from the truth and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner back from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins." Even James' word about recovering a backsliding brother is in the Old Testament way. What he says about covering a multitude of sins is almost a quotation from the Old Testament. Psalm 32:1 says, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." Psalm 85:2 says, "Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin." Furthermore, Proverbs 10:12b says, "Love covereth all sins." These verses clearly indicate that in the Old Testament to forgive sin is to cover it. In the New Testament, however, to forgive sin is to forget it (Heb. 8:12). Therefore, we see once again, this time concerning the practice of the church life in the way of mixture, that James' concept of recovering a backsliding brother to repentance for forgiveness is according to the Old Testament way.

THE INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

After considering all the matters in the Epistle of James that show us a life not fully according to and for God's New Testament economy, we must go on to consider a major problem--the problem of the inspiration of the Scriptures. Since we have pointed out so many shortcomings of the book of James, some may wonder if this Epistle is inspired of God, if it is God-breathed. In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul says, "All Scripture is God-breathed." Therefore, we need to explain carefully what is our attitude toward the inspiration of the Scriptures in relation to the book of James.

First, we definitely believe that all Scripture is God-breathed, that is, inspired by God. We believe that every word of every book of the Bible has been breathed out by God.

Second, although every line and word of the Scripture is inspired by God, this does not mean that every word in this

holy Book is the word of God, but we must be very careful in our understanding of this matter. In the Bible there are a great many words that are not God's words. We may give several examples to make this matter clear.

In Genesis 3:1, 3-5 we have words spoken by the serpent. First the serpent asked the woman, "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (v. 1). Then the serpent went on to say, "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" (vv. 4-5). These words spoken by the serpent are actually words uttered by the Devil, Satan.

In the book of Genesis we also have words spoken by evil persons. For instance, in Genesis 4:23-24 Lamech boasted to his wives, "Hear my voice; ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech: for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold." Throughout the Old Testament many other words were spoken by evildoers and by those who are enemies of God and of His people. To be sure, none of those words are God's words.

We may cite further examples from the book of Job and from the Psalms. In the book of Job many things are spoken by Job and his friends, all of whom were godly. The young man, Elihu, also was a godly person. Eventually, God Himself came in to speak and He repudiated many of the things that had been spoken by Job and his friends. God would not recognize many of the words of those godly men as His words. Instead of being the word of God, many of the words spoken by Job and his friends were merely human. Furthermore, in the Psalms certain words are merely the utterances of men, whereas others are truly the word of God.

In the New Testament we also find words that are not the word of God. According to the gospel of Matthew, the high priest demanded that the Lord Jesus tell His investigators whether or not He was the Christ, the Son of God (Matt. 26:63). After the Lord gave His answer, the high priest declared, "He has blasphemed! What further

need do we have of witnesses? Behold, now you have heard the blasphemy" (v. 65). Furthermore, the people shouted, "Crucify, crucify him!" (John 19:6). Certainly, although the Gospels were breathed by God, inspired by God, the words of the high priest and of the people are not God's words.

As recorded in the Gospels, Peter also said certain things that are not the word of God. Receiving a revelation from the Father, in Matthew 16:16 Peter declared, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." However, after the Lord went on to speak about His death, Peter took Him and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God be merciful to You, Lord; this shall by no means happen to You!" (Matt. 16:22). To be sure, what Peter said here was not the word of God. This is proved by the fact that the Lord turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men" (v. 23). Actually, what Peter said was not even his own word; it was a word that came from Satan.

In Matthew 17:4 we have another instance of a word spoken by Peter that is not the word of God: "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You are willing, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Here Peter spoke in a nonsensical way, and his word certainly was not the word of God.

Other examples of words spoken by Peter that are not words of God can be found in Matthew 26:33, 70, 72, and 74. After the Lord Jesus told the disciples that they all would be stumbled in Him, Peter said, "If all shall be stumbled in You, I will never be stumbled" (v. 33). However, when he was questioned about being with Jesus, he denied it, saying, "I do not know what you are saying!" (v. 70). Again he denied with an oath, "I do not know the man!" (v. 72). Finally, "he began to curse and to swear, I do not know the man!" (v. 74). These words were spoken by Peter, but they were instigated by the Devil, the evil one. Although these words are recorded in the Gospels and were breathed by God, they are not the word of God.

Let us go on to the book of Acts. No doubt, when Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost, whatever he spoke was

the word of God. But in chapter twenty-one of Acts we have record of words that are not God's word. In Acts 21:20 and 21 James and the other elders said to Paul, "Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: and they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs." Notice that James points out that these Jews were all zealous for the law. Then James and the others proceeded to make the following proposal to Paul: "We have four men which have a vow on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law" (vv. 23-24). Whose word is this? Is it the word of God? No, this is a word spoken by godly elders, of whom James was the leading one. We should not think that, just because these men were godly, what they spoke here is the word of God.

In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul says, "Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord, but I give my opinion as having received mercy of the Lord to be faithful" (v. 25). After giving his opinion concerning the matter, Paul concluded, "I think that I also have the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 7:40). Here we see that Paul first spoke his own opinion. Eventually, he had the boldness to say, "I also have the Spirit of God." Do you think that James and the other elders in Jerusalem could have spoken such a thing in Acts 21? After pointing out to Paul how many thousands of Jewish believers were zealous for the law, and after encouraging him to go to the temple with those who had a vow on them, could James and the others have dared to say, "And I believe that we also have the Spirit of God?" No, they certainly could not have said this. What was spoken by James and the other elders in Acts 21 was not the word of God; instead, it was the word of godly men.

Both in Acts 21 and in the Epistle of James we have

words spoken by James, a godly man. If we understand the nature of chapter twenty-one of Acts, we shall know the position of the Epistle of James. In Acts 21 and in the book of James we have the words of a godly man. Keeping the law is godly, and fulfilling a vow and paying the charge for others is also godly. In his Epistle James wrote in a godly way concerning many things: visiting widows and orphans, keeping oneself unspotted from the world, fulfilling the perfect law of freedom, saying, "If the Lord wills," concerning the future, encouraging the believers to pray according to the example of Elijah. James' word regarding these things may be godly, but it is not God's word. Nevertheless, such a book is included among the holy writings, which were breathed by God, inspired by God.

Just as chapters one and two of Genesis were breathed by God, so chapter three of Genesis was also breathed by God. Although certain words in Genesis 3 are not God's words, the entire chapter was breathed out by God. God inspired this record for a purpose. If we did not have the record of the serpent's speaking as found in Genesis 3, we could not know the serpent's subtlety. Therefore, God breathed out this record in order to expose the subtlety of the enemy.

The principle is the same concerning Peter's word to the Lord Jesus in Matthew 16:22. If this word had not been recorded, we would not be able to know how such a believer, one who loved the Lord to the uttermost and received from the Father a high revelation concerning Him, could still be instigated by the enemy, Satan, to speak something contrary to God's economy. Peter's word in this verse surely is not the word of God. But this record was breathed out by God for the purpose of showing us the evil instigation and subtlety of God's enemy.

In like manner, although certain words in the Epistle of James are the words of James and not the words of God, God inspired the writing of this Epistle for a particular purpose. Part of this purpose is that we may realize that it is possible even for a godly man to be veiled concerning

God's New Testament economy. If the book of James were not part of the Scriptures, there would be a hole, a gap, in the Bible. Without Acts 21 and the book of James, probably none of us would ever think that a godly man could be so veiled and covered in relation to God's economy. If we did not have Acts 21 and the Epistle of James, we would never imagine that a godly man could have such a lack concerning a clear vision of the New Testament economy of God. Therefore, we should be thankful that we have the book of James to help us realize that it is not adequate simply to be godly, holy, scriptural, spiritual, and victorious. Perhaps this may have been adequate for someone to be a saint in the Old Testament, but it is not sufficient for us to be a New Testament member of Christ, a bona fide son of God regenerated by Him. This should help us understand why the Epistle of James is included as part of the Scriptures breathed by God. This Epistle was included for the purpose of showing us that it is possible for a godly man to be far off from God's New Testament economy.

I realize that by speaking frankly concerning the shortcomings of the Epistle of James with regard to God's New Testament economy, I run the risk of being unjustly accused of not believing that every word in the Bible is God-breathed, inspired by Him. However, if all these messages on the Life-study of James, especially this message, are read carefully, it will be clear that there is no ground to say such a thing. We do not have the slightest doubt about the divine inspiration of the Bible. On the contrary, we have proper understanding concerning the inspiration of the Scriptures. We believe that the entire Bible, every word in the Scripture, is God-breathed. Nevertheless, not every word in the Bible is the word of God. As we have seen, many words recorded in the Scriptures are the words of Satan, evil men, God's opposers, and even the nonsensical talk of godly men. Furthermore, all the words of the Scriptures were breathed out by God and recorded for a particular purpose. In Genesis 3 the purpose is to expose the subtlety of the enemy. In Acts 21 and in the book of James the purpose is

to show us the possibility that a godly person may lack the clear, heavenly view of God's New Testament economy. Praise the Lord that everything in the Bible is God's breath, and everything has been recorded to serve a particular purpose! We thank God for the Scriptures breathed out by Him.