

THE WHY AND HOW OF PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

Ursula Kemp, 1977

Lesson 15

REVIEW:

Let me summarize quickly what we learned from verses 4-12, in the first chapter of James. **Verse 4** taught us **the desired result of testing --spiritual maturity and completeness**, a coming ever closer to the full measure of the stature of Christ (Eph. 4:13). In **verse 5** we saw that while **the mature believer has no lack, the immature or growing believer lacks wisdom** in applying what he knows in a pressure situation. He **is told not to hesitate in asking God for wisdom**. He is told HOW to ask because God knows HOW to give (v. 6a).

James shows us in **verse 6b** that **the wavering believer** is like a storm-tossed, wind-blown wave. Lacking stability, he is confused and at the mercy of indecision. Because **he has ignored** an important **prayer principle--asking in faith**, he cannot expect an answer from God. In **verse 7** the illustration from nature finds a parallel in real life, in **the "two-souled" believer** who **fluctuates** between belief and unbelief, trust and mistrust. We noted that indecision is the root of instability.

Verses 9 through 11 focus on spiritual and material riches. What was to be **the right attitude of the lowly, impoverished believer?** (That he was RICH IN FAITH.) And that of **the wealthy believer?** (That he was TOTALLY DEPENDENT on the Lord; that riches were transient.) What **illustration from nature** does James use to portray that nothing in this life will last? (The heat and sand storm of the desert.) Because of the nature of temporal things, we must put our trust in God!

Verse 12 names the reward for testing endured, the CROWN OF LIFE, which is realized in eternity (cf. Rev. 2:10).

We also noted that **Verses 3-12 present a panoramic view of the believer's pilgrimage** from this life unto the life that is to come, the pilgrim's progress of testing, maturing, reliance on God; his eventual occupation with heavenly things, his home-going and coronation.

The remainder of this chapter deals with the here and now, and this is where we resume our study.

OUTLINE: JAMES 1:13-27

I. DETAILED OUTLINE

A. James 1:13-21: The progression and conquest of sin.

1. The source of temptation (vs. 13, 14).
2. The progression of sin (v. 15).
3. The source of giving (vs. 16-17).
4. The source of regeneration (v. 18).
5. The conquest of sin (vs. 19-21).
 - a. Control of the tongue (v. 19).
 - b. Control of temper (v. 20).
 - c. Means of conquest (v. 21).

B. James 1:22-25: The doers and the hearers of the Word.

1. The command to PRACTICE THE WORD (v. 22).
2. The reasons for the command (vs. 23-25).
 - a. Reflection of what we are (vs. 23, 24a).
 - b. Reflection of what we should be (v. 24b).
 - c. Effect of the Word (v. 25).

C. James 1:26-27: The difference between religion and faith.

1. The acid test (v. 26).
2. The tangible proof (v. 27).

II. TEACHING OF JAMES 1:13-27

APPROACH:

If James 1:1-12 did not convict you, James 1:13-27 will! The first part of our study, Section A, places all responsibility for sin squarely on your shoulders and mine; Section B rubs in our short-comings, and Section C puts us to the acid test to see whether or not we really live our faith. Let us maintain objectivity as well as sensitivity as we allow the Holy Spirit to deal with us through this particular portion of the Word.

A. The Progression and conquest of sin (James 1:13-21).

The source of temptation (vs. 13, 14). The word "tempted" occurs five times in these two verses. It is the same Greek word, PEIRAZO, which we have already seen in **verses 2, 3 and 12**, both in its noun and verbal forms. In the earlier passages it

had a good connotation--testing for approval. Since the context must determine the correct usage of this word, we must evaluate what is in view here. Certainly, it is not the trial of faith; rather, it is **solicitation to evil**.

The alert Bible student will ask why James suddenly **switched from trial to temptation**. What is the background for James' statement; and why is such a statement necessary in the first place? Here is where a good, sound commentary comes in handy. In my own search I came across **WILLIAM BARCLAY'S Daily Study Bible Series**. His commentary on James is (for the most part) very reliable. He writes (and accurately so) that the background for this passage is a belief commonly held by the Jews, that in every man there exists a tendency toward good and a tendency toward evil. THE GOOD TENDENCY (יֵצֶר הַטוֹב, YETSER HATOB) and the EVIL TENDENCY (יֵצֶר הָרָע, YETSER HARA) struggle for supremacy. The Jews had arrived at this conclusion from an observation based on their own experience. **Paul** premises his own statement in **Romans 7:15-25** on that same concept. We refer to it as the "two natures" within the Christian, the "new man" and the "old man."

After they had established the fact of the problem, the Jews questioned its source. Where did the evil tendency originate? Some claimed that it came from Satan and his fallen angels (i.e., the writers of Ecclesiasticus and the Book of Enoch). Others held that man was responsible for the existence of evil (Book of Enoch and Rabbinical opinions); still others argued that since God created all things He must have created evil as well. Boldly these learned Rabbis stuck to their claim, a claim that on the surface seems to be supported by Isaiah 45:7 but in fact implies misery as a result of sin. Of course, such a claim is blasphemous because it permits man to hold God responsible for sin and evil!

Certainly, it is so much easier and more comfortable to shift one's blame on others (and so absolve self) than it is to admit guilt and accept responsibility for one's actions! This trend is as old as man himself. Adam pointed an accusing finger at God and the woman God had given him, when God charged him with the first sin in the Garden (Gen. 3:12). The woman caught on quickly and claimed that it was all the serpent's fault (Gen. 3:13). The shifting of the blame did not alter the fact that the man and the woman were guilty as charged, but that seemed to make no difference to mankind. Man has not changed one bit; he is still prone to blame others, and as a last resort he blames God. The complaint, "Why has God let this happen to me?" is the umpteenth verse of the same old song the first couple composed in Eden. It comes in mighty handy, particularly if there is no one else around to implicate for one's wrong doing! Any scape goat will do!!!

To settle the ancient argument as to who is to blame for all the problems, James goes on record to refute the notion and rebuke all who would blame God: **GOD IS NOT THE SOURCE OF EVIL OF ANY SORT!** He is "untempted of evil" (literal translation). That precludes any solicitation to evil on the part of God!

Well then, could we be justified in saying, "THE DEVIL MADE ME DO IT?" Again, NO! In tempting the woman and man in the Garden the devil did not break off the forbidden fruit and force it into man's hand, nor did he cram it down their throats! James traces the source of sin to LUST, to those selfish desires that raise their ugly heads within us! LUST ALWAYS SEEKS TO JUSTIFY A CATERING TO SELF, A GRATIFICATION OF ONE'S OWN DESIRES.

James explains to us how this works. In only two sentences he records the historicity of sin. Let us note the various stages in the progression of sin: **Stage One:** TEMPTATION! **Stage Two:** SEDUCTION! **Stage Three:** CONCEPTION (pregnancy)! **Stage Four:** BIRTH! **Stage Five:** MATURITY (of sin)! **Stage Six:** DEATH (spiritual--separation from God; physical--one result of sin; eternal--the second death)!

Again, watch for the rich imagery of James' vocabulary. He personifies **the allurement of sin** as a harlot who uses all her charm to seduce the intended victim. NOW NOTE this principle: TEMPTATION IS NOT SINFUL IN ITSELF; SUCCUMBING TO TEMPTATION IS! It is a well-known fact of life that the tempter never shows those he tempts the seamy side of this world, but its glory, power and glitter! Think of the Lord's temptation (Luke 4:5,6)! Think of the woman's temptation; the tempter merely pointed out that the fruit was good for food, pleasant to the eyes and desirable to make one wise (Gen. 3:6)! Just so, the challenge, "Just this once, for kicks," sounds innocent enough, but it never takes into account the dire consequences of addiction!

James chose an analogy which is universally understood. The lust of the flesh is common to all mankind. However, remember that he simply uses it as an analogy! Behind this analogy is a greater danger than promiscuity; that danger is twofold: (1) evidence of a dead faith, a total lack of testimony; James 2:17; (2) the sin unto death; James 5:20! Thus, although James uses physical lust as an illustration, physical lust is not the subject of this epistle (see Jas. 2:11; 4:2,3). Rather, what we see here is a perversion or an outright prostitution of the grace of God!

The progression of sin may also be seen in a study of the first murder (Gen. 4:3-12). Lust for God's approval led Cain to murder Abel! We all do what we do because we WANT to do it!

The source of giving (vs. 16-17). We established that God is not the source of temptation but the source of all our benefits! Note the hints James drops in the earlier portions of his letter and how he develops them. Where did James first mention God as the Giver? (Verse 5 --"God giveth ...liberally.") In **verse 16** James tells us to make no mistake about the source of temptation and the One who is the source of perfect giving! In **verse 17** we see the nature of the Giver, and the nature of His gifts.

"Every good gift" is a reference to **the act of giving**; every "perfect gift," to **the quality of God's gifts**. "Perfect" is our word TELEIOS (see v. 4). It means "complete"--the ultimate in gift giving! Next, we have **the direction** from which it comes: it descends from **the source** of One Who is called "the Father of lights."

Question this statement! Why this particular reference to God the Father? The answer is simple: temptation, or solicitation to evil conjures up visions of Satan, of darkness, of sin, of all that is vile and contemptible. On the other hand, GOD IS LIGHT (I John 1:5), and the Creator of the lights in the heaven. Why did God put them in the firmament? To divide the day from the night; to give light upon the earth; to be for signs and seasons (Gen. 1:14-18). The constant **changing from day to night stands out in sharp contrast to the never-changing God** (Heb. 13:8)! Unlike the waxing and waning of the moon, and unlike the seasons, God is immutable. There is not the slightest trace of variableness, and no eclipse of His faithfulness to us!

The source of regeneration (v. 18). Not only is God the source of every perfect gift, both spiritual and material, He is the Giver of life. Next, James contrasts **man's evil tendency to give in to temptation and bring forth sin and death to God's sovereign will to regenerate those who will believe in Christ**. He delineates **the means and the purpose of regeneration**; the means --**the word of truth** (a reference to the Gospel); the purpose, that **we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures!**

(WERE WE TO UNDERTAKE A CATEGORICAL STUDY, WE MIGHT PICK UP THE DOCTRINES OF REGENERATION AND THE HOLY SPIRIT AT THIS POINT. OR ELSE, WE MIGHT WANT TO EXAMINE THE CONCEPT OF FIRSTFRUITS.)

A brief word on "firstfruits" is needed here. The Old Testament law required that the first of all things be holy (or set apart) as a possession of God's. The firstborn was that which was thought to be the most excellent! And the firstborn of man and beast had to be sanctified to the Lord Jehovah (Ex. 13:2, 15; cf. 12:11-15). The same applied to the firstfruits (Ex. 23:19; Deut. 18:4) of all that the earth produced. The presentation of the first sheaf of grain became symbolic of an abundant harvest; and in its figurative sense, the firstfruits of Israel spoke of a future harvest of souls. In the New Testament the same concept is used in connection with the "firstfruits of the Spirit" (the pledge of the Holy Spirit in this dispensation; Rom. 8:23; a guarantee of coming things), Christ, as the first One to be raised from the dead (I Cor. 15:20), and as a description of a new convert (Rom. 16:5).

What does James have in mind, when he says that **we should be a "certain firstfruits of his creatures?"** I think that what is meant here in terms of our modern concept is that we who are God's redeemed should be **God's showcase of grace, a tangible promise of what others might become!**

PRIVILEGE ALWAYS CARRIES WITH IT RESPONSIBILITY! IF WE ARE TO BE GOD'S SHOWCASE OF GRACE, THEN CERTAIN PROOFS OF OUR REGENERATION AND

SANCTIFICATION OUGHT TO BE EVIDENT IN OUR LIVES. They are called "things that accompany salvation" (Heb. 6:9).

The conquest of sin (vs. 19-21). The most obvious manifestation of our salvation should be a RENEWED MIND which leads to a CHANGED LIFE STYLE! Such a life style should reflect the righteousness (perfect goodness) of God (v. 20), which is achieved in us by the control of the Holy Spirit in every area of our life. This, in turn, would become evident in **thought-control, tongue-control** and **conduct-control!** James knew well the weaknesses of all who would read his letter; he came right to the point, encouraging every believer to deal with matters unbecoming to a child of God. (Read vs. 19-21). He says to us, "Let every believer" do thus and so! How then, do we conquer sin?

Control of the tongue (v. 19). Because we all like to put in our two bits' worth or hear ourselves speak, few of us make good listeners. Yet we demand attention when we have something to say! **Zeno**, the Greek philosopher and founder of the Stoic school said, "**We have two ears but only one mouth, that we may hear more and speak less!**" The Bible has much to say concerning the tongue, but since the subject comes up in James 3, we want to discuss it at that time. Here, we want to tie in the hasty tongue with the quick temper.

Control of the temper (v. 20). James points out the danger of the hair-trigger temper. It is a biblical principle that the tongue spills the contents of the mind (Matt. 12:34). The erupting temper shows a lack of self-control, a vulnerability of soul (**read Prov. 25:28**). While such an outburst may release the tension of the speaker, it inflicts immeasurable hurt on his victim. **Proverbs 29:20** warns against hasty speech! "Wrath" (anger) here is of the sinful variety rather than righteous indignation, which is permissible. If this happens to be your area of weakness, come to grips with it, for it shows that you are not yet the kind of person God wants you to be!

Means of Conquest (v. 21). What is the remedy for the Christian brand of "hoof and mouth disease?" A "laying aside" (literal) of something called "all filthiness" (ῥυπαρία, RUPARIA). The Greek word for laying aside means to "strip off as a soiled garment," and RUPARIA implies "moral filthiness, uncleanness, defilement, pollution." We hear much about the danger of pollution; but there is nothing more devastating to the spiritual life than the pollution of sin. Another thing we must strip off is a "superabundance of wickedness (malice, grudge)" (περισσεία, PERISSEIA, κακία, KAKIA).

Notice how practical the Word is; we are told what constitutes defilement in the spiritual life, and how to deal with it--**lay it aside!** While **salvation freed us from the curse of sin and its penalty**, we **need daily salvation** (deliverance) **from the power of sin!** God clothed us with the garments of salvation (Isa. 61:10); what need have we of our own filthy rags? The means of our taking off that which pollutes our soul is confession of sin (I John 1:9). Cleansed from all unrighteousness we are free once

more to serve our Lord! But there is more to it than a simple laying aside sin; what we need **next is the means to keep from becoming defiled so easily**. The blood of Jesus Christ keeps on **cleansing** us from all sin (I John 1:7); the power of the Word **fortifies** us against sin! Thus, we are commanded to **take in the Word with an attitude of teachability**. That is **the second means of victory over sin**. Once "implanted" in the heart, the Word is to take root. That is **the desired result** (1) it must find **fertile ground**; (2) **bear fruit!** In these words, James refers us back to the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:1-8; Luke 8:12-15). The ground is comparable to the hearer's frame of mind and his willingness to receive the Word sown. The **third result** would be the **deliverance of the soul from the power of sin** (remember the use of SOZO in James)!

B. The doers and hearers of the Word (Jas. 1:22-25). That the desired result is the exception rather than the rule is the teaching of this next section. Sad to say, we must be commanded to put into operation what we know and believe. KNOWLEDGE OF DOCTRINE IS NEVER AN END IN ITSELF; IT IS A MEANS TOWARD AN END! APPLICATION OF DOCTRINE IS NEVER AUTOMATIC; IT TAKES A CONSCIOUS EFFORT! (**Read John 13:17.**) You may pride yourself of knowing the whole realm of doctrine and having a notebook full of doctrinal notes and yet remain **a hearer only** for the rest of your life! PRACTICE THE WORD!

The reasons for the command (vs. 23-25). James explains why we should be more than hearers. He cites **another illustration: the ancient mirrors** of highly polished metal and those who see themselves reflected. The Bible is God's mirror. As we look into its pages **we see reflected the "face of our birth"**--- the natural man in all his hideous sinfulness and pride, in his attempts at self-reform (v. 23). Here is the person who sits in church and listens to the message proclaimed. Insensitive to the impact it should have on his own life, he disregards the voice of the Spirit and walks away the same person he was when he came in. The message went in one ear and came out the other. Here is the person who is challenged academically by the content of Scripture; he learns for the sake of learning, but the message leaves him cold personally. Instead, he becomes hypercritical of all who do not stroke their **T's** and dot their **I's** the same way he was taught! Perhaps though, he has a fleeting thought that his friend or neighbor should have heard that message that day, as he really needed it. It is a true saying that **IT DOES NOT MATTER HOW OFTEN YOU HAVE GONE THROUGH THE WORD BUT HOW OFTEN THE WORD HAS GONE THROUGH YOU!** **For it is God's intent that the Word transform your life and mine!** That is why **we see in God's mirror the reflection of what we should be**, and reaching that goal is usually a matter of growth, a progress!

The effect of the Word is seen in verse 25. Here we have the person who takes to heart what the Word says to him. He is not deluded that hearing is the sole virtue in his Christian life. Rather, he stoops to look hard into the Word and is resolved to deal with sin in his life. James calls the mirror "the perfect law of liberty"; Paul refers

to it as "the law of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:2). Both terms denote God's holy and righteous demands for those who are freed from the Mosaic Law.

They see what is wrong with them, and they do something about it--they obey God; they live out in their practical experience what they hear to be true theoretically! BECOMING "DOERS THAT WORK" (put their knowledge into operation), THEY FIND PERFECT HAPPINESS IN OBEDIENCE TO GOD!

C. The difference between religion and faith (James 1:26-27). In this third section we are examining today, we note a transition from the rather impersonal illustration of **A** hearer and **A** doer to the personal issue: WHERE DO YOU FIT IN? Are you a hearer? Then this is true of you: your religion θρησκεία, THRESKEIA--religion, piety) is worthless. It may impress you or your friends, but it does not pass the acid test: tongue-control through self-control, submission to the practical aspects of the Word. Instead, you have allowed yourself to be deluded! There is no greater folly than self-deception!

What the world looks for is **tangible proof of what you believe and stand for** (v. 27). Before omniscient God, search yourself for evidence of your faith in your life. Do you manifest concern for those in need (whatever their need may be)? Do you live a life compatible with the will of God and the Word of God? You are in the world but not of it; hold yourself aloof from its defilement!

THERE IT IS! GOD SPELLS OUT HIS WILL, BUT HE LEAVES THE OPTION WITH YOU! THE DECISION IS UP TO YOU AND ME: WILL WE BECOME INVOLVED OR REMAIN ON THE SIDELINES, SNIPING, CRITICIZING? PRAY GOD THIS LESSON MAY STRIKE HOME WITH ALL OF US!

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

Lesson 15

I. FIND AND LIST THE SEVEN "LETS" IN JAMES, CHAPTER 1! NEXT TO EACH OF THEM, STATE IN YOUR OWN WORDS TO WHAT THESE REFER (See example)!

1. "Let patience have her perfect work" (v. 4). (Outcome of the testing of faith.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

II. IN YOUR OWN WORDS, RECORD HOW JAMES PORTRAYS GOD IN JAMES, CHAPTER 1! (Clue: Look in the following verses: v. 1, 5 cf. 17a, 12, 13, 17b, 18, 20, 27. See example.)

1. As sovereign God and Master of all (v. 1).
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

III. UNSCRAMBLE THIS KEY MESSAGE OF JAMES, CHAPTER 1!

RUO VESIL HOULDS STAFMINE HATIF NI OGD DAN CEEDBONEI OT SHI ROWD!