

JAMES & JUDE – LESSON THREE

LESSON TWO (continued)

c. Today's generations take pills to deal with problems that our grandparents would not have considered problems – like bringing up children, facing a tomorrow that is essentially the same as today; problems of feeling trapped and bored; problems of having time and not knowing how to fill it.

d. The cynic would say that the issue of whether there is life after death has been replaced by the issue of whether there is life before death.

e. Essentially it is the problem of finding meaning, which James says can be answered by a gift of wisdom from God given to those whose personalities are integrated around him.

iii. Are we proving the reality of our sole allegiance to God in the place of prayer – not in the public place of confrontation with the world (that will come later), but in the secret place of prayer? For out of this will emerge that wisdom that unifies the personality and holds us on a steady course in the storm.

E. An example of facing tests with wisdom. vv. 9-12.

1. While the relationship of these verses to what precedes is not entirely clear, leading some to suggest that James' epistle is a series of unrelated topics, there does appear to be some connection if no more than that the preceding discussion brings the present discussion to James' mind.

a. James could have used any of the contrasts in life – loneliness and companionship, long married life and unexpected bereavement, hope fulfilled and hope disappointed, work and unemployment.

b. The one that he chose is probably more universal than any of the others.

2. The tests are different, but no less real.

a. The brother of low estate is a brother who is low on the socio-economic scale and is poor and powerless; the brother who is rich is blessed with the goods of this world.

b. While the brother of low estate might look longingly upon the bounty of the rich so that he might be relieved of the daily struggle for survival, the tests of the rich are no less real than those faced by the poor. Those with possessions are tempted to trust in them. Paul touched the Achilles' heel of the world's wealth with his description of "uncertain riches." 1 Tim. 6:17.

c. The magnetism of riches is powerful and insistent and we need the wisdom of God to see through the façade.

i. We do not have to be wealthy to desire money, and the desire is as threatening as the actuality (1 Tim. 6:9); we do not have to possess to be snared by the delights of possession.

ii. But the Bible never teaches that wealth *per se* is wrong – the Lord gave Solomon riches as well as wisdom. 1 Kings 3:12-13.

iii. Everything depends on how it is used and what place it hold in the heart of its possessor.

3. The brother of low estate is to handle his test by being proud of his exaltation.

a. He learns that he matters in the church. There were no distinctions made among men; the slave could be an elder, the master could be an humble member.

b. He learns that he matters in the world. God has a purpose for every man. Even a person restricted to a bed of pain and sickness can be active in prayer.

c. He learns that he matters to God. No man for whom Christ died is worthless.

4. The rich brother is to handle his test by being proud of his humiliation.

a. Christianity brings the rich a new sense of self abasement.

b. The rich believer, well-off and secure in his possessions, with great status in the eyes of the world, is to remember that

his only lasting security comes through his relationship with one who was despised and rejected of men.

c. His wealth brings him no earthly security for both his life and his riches are as uncertain as flower of the field that scorches in the noon-day heat, fades and dies.

d. When trouble comes, the first concern for the rich man should not be the state of his possessions, but the steadfastness of his faith. Matt. 6:33.

5. Both are to receive a crown of life if they successfully endure.

a. In this life he has been purified by fire; the weaknesses of his character are removed and he emerges strong and pure.

b. In the life to come he receives the crown of life.

c. The Christian has a joy that no other man can ever have, a royalty that no others ever realize because, whatever his earthly circumstances, he is a child of God.

i. The cold fact is that, Christian or not, submissive or rebellious, we are all going to suffer; trial is an inevitable part of the human condition.

ii. QUESTION: Would you rather suffer with God at your side, or without Him by your side?

iii. It might comfort you to know that whatever your circumstances, suffering or personal traumas, the Lord Jesus Christ knows all about it.

a. Hebrews 2:17-18 17 Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. 18 For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

b. Hebrews 12:1-2 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 2 Looking unto Jesus the author

and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

c. For 33 years Jesus Christ walked the earth as God incarnate, God made man. In that time he knew human rejection. Even his friends turned on him in the end. His family didn't understand him. His brothers, James included, were embarrassed by him. He was unjustly arrested, convicted, and sentenced to die. The people to whom he had been sent as Messiah clamored for the release of a murderer named Barabbas rather than for the freedom of the Son of God. And then the cross, where, in separation from his Father, he finished his task.

d. Has anyone ever suffered more?

iv. Listen to it – If we trust God He will never withdraw his presence from us in the midst of trial and trouble. We will have Him to cling to, no matter what.

v. Hebrews 13:5-6 5 Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. 6 So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

LESSON THREE

F. How to handle temptation. vv. 13-18.

1. The same Greek word may be translated *test* or *trial* or *temptation*, with the meaning being determined by the context.

a. In verses 13 -15 it is clear that *temptation* is the correct translation since God does test men in the sense of permitting circumstances that are tests or trials.

b. James has been discussing tests, so why does he now turn to temptations and mix the two?

i. Is there a connection between tests from without and temptations from within?

ii. Clearly there is: if we are not careful, the testing on the outside may become temptations on the inside.

iii. When our circumstances are difficult, we may find ourselves blaming God, complaining against God, questioning His love, and resisting His will.

a. Robert Burns wrote:

me
Thou know'st that Thou hast formed

With passions wild and strong;
And list'ning to their witching voice
Has often led me wrong.

b. In effect, he is saying that his conduct was as it was because God made him as he was.

c. James sternly rebukes that view. To him man's own evil desire is responsible for man's sin; sin would be helpless if there were nothing to which it could appeal.

iv. Satan provides us with an opportunity to escape the difficulty; this is a temptation. 2 Cor. 2:11; Eph. 6:11.

v. A temptation is an opportunity to do a bad thing or to accomplish a good thing in a bad way

a. It is a good thing to pass an exam, but it is a bad thing to cheat to obtain that goal.

b. It is a good thing to eat, but it is a bad thing to steal the food that is eaten.

c. There are four facts we must consider if we are to overcome temptation.

i. Desire (v. 14).

a. Lust refers to any desire, not just sexual passions.

b. The normal desires of life were given to us by God and are not evil within themselves; indeed, without them we could not function.

c. It is when we want to satisfy these desires outside of God's will that we get into trouble; eating is normal – gluttony is sin; sleep is normal – laziness is sin; Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled – whoremonger and adulterers God will judge. Heb. 13:4.

d. Some people try to become “spiritual” by denying or suppressing these normal desires, but this only make them less human.

e. These fundamental normal desires are the steam in the boiler that makes the machinery go; turn off the steam and you have no power; let the steam go its own way and you have destruction.

f. The secret is in constant control.

ii. Deception (v. 14).

a. No temptation appears as temptation; it always seems more alluring than it really is.

b. James uses two illustrations to prove his point.

i. *Drawn away* refers to the baiting of a trap for an unwary animal.

ii. *Enticed* refers to the baiting of a hook to attract an unsuspecting fish.

c. No animal willfully steps into a known trap, and no fish bites a naked hook; the idea is to hide the trap and the hook.

d. Temptation always carries with it some bait that appeals to our natural desires.

i. The bait not only attracts us, it disguises the fact that yielding to the enticement will bring sorrow and punishment.

ii. Lot never would have pitched his tent toward Sodom if he had not seen good land or if he had seen the tragic result of his choice.

iii. David never would have committed adultery if he had seen the tragic consequences that would follow.

e. When Jesus was tempted by Satan he always responded with the word of God; three times he said, "It is written. . ."

i. When you know and understand scripture it helps you to recognize the "bait."

ii. Psalm 119:11.

iii. Disobedience (v. 15).

a. Desire deals with the emotions; deception deals with the intellect; disobedience deals with the will.

b. The immature may act on the basis of feelings, but adults are supposed to act on the basis of will.

c. The mature act because it is right, no matter how they feel.

d. The immature are more apt to fall into temptation because they let their feelings make the decision.

e. The more you exercise your will in saying a decisive "no" to temptation the more God can take control of your life. Jas. 4:11.

iv. Death (v. 15).

a. Disobedience gives birth to death, not life.

b. It may take years for the sin to mature, but when it does, the result will be death.

c. If we believe God's word that death is the inevitable result of sin, it will encourage us not to yield to temptation.

d. Whenever you are faced with temptation, get your eyes off the bait and look ahead to see the consequences of sin: *the judgment of God* (the wages of sin is death, Rom. 6:23).

d. Consider God's goodness as a source of strength to resist temptation.

i. One of Satan's approaches is to convince us that God does not love us or care for us and that He is holding out on us.

a. When he approached Eve he suggested that if God really loved her He would permit her to eat of the forbidden tree.

b. When he tempted Jesus he suggested to Him that if His Father really loved Him He would not be hungry.

ii. Satan attempts to undermine the goodness of God because he recognizes that it is a great barrier against yielding to temptation.

iii. Since God is good we don't need anyone else, including Satan, to meet our needs.

iv. It is better to be hungry within the will of God than full outside the will of God.

v. Once we start to doubt or simply forget God's goodness we will be attracted to Satan's offers and our natural desires will reach out for his bait.

v. James states four facts about the goodness of God.

a. God gives only good gifts.
Everything good in this world came from God – if it did not come from God it is not good; if it comes from God it must be good even if we do not see it immediately.

b. The way God gives is good.

i. It is possible for someone to give us a gift in a way that is less than loving; the value of a gift can be diminished by the way that it is given to us

ii. But when God gives us a blessing he does it in a loving gracious, manner; what he gives and how he gives are both good.

c. God gives constantly.

i. “Cometh down” is a present participle – “keeps on coming down.”

ii. God does not give occasionally; even when we do not or cannot see his gifts he is sending them.

d. God does not change.

i. There are no shadows with the Father of lights.

ii. It is impossible for God to change: He cannot change for the worse because he is holy; he cannot change for the better because he is already perfect.

iii. This means that we should never question his love or doubt his goodness when difficulties come and temptations appear.

vi. Satan never gives any gifts; you always pay dearly for them.

vii. God’s greatest gift (v. 18 – he begat us with the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures); note the characteristics of this birth.

a. It is divine; it is not of ourselves.

b. It is through the word of God. See, 1 Peter 1:23. If it is not taught in the word of truth it will not save you. God has no other way.

c. It is the finest birth possible – it makes us a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. The Jews understood the word firstfruits – they brought them to the Lord as an expression of their devotion and obedience.

i. By granting us a new or second birth God declared that He cannot accept the old birth.

ii. He accepted Abel, not Cain; He accepted Isaac, not Ishmael; He accepted Jacob, not Esau.

iii. Your first birth is no good no matter how noble it might have been in the eyes of men; God announces that you need a second birth.

d. This experience of the new birth helps us to overcome temptation – if we let the old nature (first birth) take over, we fail.

i. Of course, this new nature must be fed the word of God daily that it might be strong enough to fight the battle.

ii. No matter what excuses we make, we have no one to blame but ourselves.

3. In his reception of the word. 1:19-27.

A. The emphasis in this section is on self-deception: deceiving your own selves (1:22); deceiveth his own heart (1:26).

1. If a Christian sins because Satan deceives him that is one thing.

2. But if he deceives himself that is a far more serious matter.

3. Matthew 7:22-23 is an example of some who deceived themselves to the extent that they argue with Jesus at judgment.

4. Even New Testament Christians can and do deceive themselves. Revelation 3:17.

5. Spiritual reality results from the proper relationship to God through his word, which is truth (John 17:17).

B. In these verses James states that we have three responsibilities toward the word of God.

1. Receive the word of God (vv. 19-21).
 - a. James calls God's word "the engrafted word" or the "implanted word."
 - b. The word of God cannot work in our lives unless we receive it in the right way.
 - i. Jesus not only said "take heed what ye hear" (Mark 4:24), He also said "Take heed how ye hear" (Luke 8:18).
 - ii. Failure to do either results in falling into the condition of "hearing they hear not, neither do they understand" (Mark 13:13).
 - iii. They attend Bible Study and worship but never seem to grow. It could be the fault of the teacher or the preacher, but it is also possible to be "dull of hearing" (Heb. 5:11).
 - c. If the seed of the word of God is to be planted in our hearts, then we must obey the instruction that James gives us.
 - i. Be swift to hear (19a). "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 13:9). "So then, faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).
 - ii. Be slow to speak (19b). Too many times we argue with God's word, if not audibly, at least in our hearts and minds. Instead of being slow to speak, the lawyer in Luke 10 argued with Jesus by asking, "and who is my neighbor?" A tribute was once paid to a linguist that he could be silent in seven different languages.
 - iii. Be slow to wrath (19c). Don't get angry at God and His word.
 - a. Many church splits are the result of short tempers and angry words.
 - b. There is a godly anger against sin, and if we love the Lord we must hate sin. Psalm 97:10.
 - c. The person who cannot get angry at sin will not have much strength to fight it.

d. But man's anger does not work God's righteousness (1:20).

e. In fact, anger is just the opposite of the steadfastness that God wants to produce in our lives and we mature in Christ (1:3-4).

f. Anger at God's word because it points our sins and weaknesses insures that our sins and weaknesses will win the battle.

2. Practice the word (vv. 22-25).

a. It is not the hearing of the word that brings blessings; it is the doing of the word; many of us mark our Bibles, but our Bibles never mark us.

b. In the previous section James compared God's word to seed; here he compares it to a mirror used for examination (vv. 23-25).

c. James describes the word into which we look as the perfect law of liberty.

i. There are three reasons why that law is perfect.

a. It is God's law.

b. It cannot be improved.

c. It is perfect to accomplish its purpose.

The word for perfect often means perfect toward some given end. If a man follows God's law he will fulfill the purpose for which God put him in the world; he will be the person he ought to be and make the contribution to the world that he ought to make.

ii. It is the law of liberty. So long as a man has to obey his own passions and emotions and desires, he is nothing less than a slave. It is when he accepts the will of God that he becomes really free – for then he is free to be what he ought to be. His service is perfect freedom and in doing his will is our peace.

d. Examination is the main purpose for owning a mirror – to be able to examine yourself and make yourself as presentable as possible. As we look into God’s word we see ourselves as we really are. James mentions several mistakes we make as we look into God’s mirror.

i. We merely glance at ourselves. Many Bible readers are only engaged in a religious exercise and do not profit from it personally. Our conscience hurts if we fail to read daily when our conscience should really bother us for reading it carelessly. A careless reading will never reveal our deepest needs. A surface photo is not nearly as good as an X-ray at seeing that which is within us.

ii. Owen Cosgrove, in a book entitled *Essentials of Discipleship*, listed a number of questions that we should ask ourselves concerning every passage of scripture that we read:

- a. Is there an example for me to follow?
- b. Is there a command for me to obey?
- c. Is there any error for me to avoid?
- d. Is there any sin for me to renounce?
- e. Is there any promise for me to claim?
- f. Is there any new thought about God?
- g. Is there any new thought about Jesus

Christ?

h. Is there any new thought about the ministry of the word in my life?

iii. We immediately forget what we see. If we looked deeply enough into our hearts what we see would be unforgettable. Would we not have the experience of Isaiah who cried, “Woe is me for I am undone” (Isa. 6:5); of Peter who exclaimed, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man” (Luke 5:8).

iv. We fail to obey what the word tells us to do. We substitute hearing or talking for doing. We hold endless conferences and committee meetings about topics like evangelism and church growth and

think we have made progress though nothing is ever done. Nothing is per se wrong about meetings, but it is wrong as a substitute for service.

e. We must remember that the blessing comes with the doing (1:25).

3. Share the word (26-27).

a. Through speech (v.26). James discusses the tongue as much as and perhaps more than any other subject. He recognized that the tongue is a serious problem because it reveals the heart (Matt. 12:34-35). If the heart is right the speech will be right. A controlled tongue means a controlled body (3:1ff).

b. Through service (v. 27a). After we see ourselves and Christ in the mirror of the word, we must see others and their needs. Words are no substitute for deeds of love (2:14-18; 1 John 3:11-18). God does not want us to pay others to minister as a substitute for our own personal service.

c. Through separation from the world (v. 27b). We are sent into the world to save others. It is only as we maintain our separation from the world that we can serve and save others. The world wants to “spot” the Christian and start to defile him.

i. First, there is the friendship of the world (James 4:4) that can lead to a love for the world (1 John 2:15-17).

ii. Second, there is conformity to the world (Rom. 12:1-2) that leads to being condemned with the world (1 Cor. 11:32).