

# REMOVING THE MASK

By

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This book is respectfully dedicated  
to my father in the Lord,  
Rev. Artel Stewart, D.D., Th.D.,  
who upon first hearing its premise  
thought I had lost my spiritual mind, but  
after reading it and studying  
the Scriptures, wholeheartedly concurred  
with the truth conveyed in  
*Removing the Mask.*



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## INTRODUCTION

*Removing the Mask* is a commentary on the book of James. It provides a key to understanding the book of James that has gone unseen by most of the commentators on the book. Please do not misconstrue this statement to be idle boasting. The fact is, in modern times, the book of James has been misunderstood by almost everyone who has ever read it. The misunderstandings and mysteries surrounding the book of James, despite the confusion, can be solved if the student of the Scriptures diligently applies the rules of interpretation in his approach to the book. The student of the Scriptures must pay close attention to the opening remarks in the book of James. There he will learn James wrote to *the twelve tribes scattered abroad*.

Despite this clear statement, all of the commentators I have read on James have assumed James was written to Christians. Dr. C. I. Scofield, along with eight consulting editors, included the following statement in the introduction to the book of James in the Scofield Reference Bible: *By "the twelve tribes scattered abroad" we are to understand, not Jews, but Christian Jews of the Dispersion.* This assumption, made by Scofield and virtually all others, has not aided in our

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understanding of the book of James, but has perpetuated the confusion surrounding the book.

Confusion often reigns when men of reputation make erroneous statements. This was the basis for the Jews' rejection of *the commandments of God for the traditions of men*. If James wrote to Christians as the commentators said, I found it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile the writings of James with the writings of Paul, even though I knew both James and Paul had written their epistles under the inspiration of the Spirit of God.

Consequently I avoided preaching from the book of James for many years because I was not comfortable with the book. I continued to read James, along with my other reading of the Scriptures, but the book as a whole was closed to me. Then a member of our church asked a question about James 5:14. I told him I thought I knew the answer, but before I gave it to him I would like to do a more detailed study. Seeking to answer his question, I approached the book of James afresh. I enlisted the rules of interpretation as I once again read and attempted to analyze the book. It was then evident by the statement, *to the twelve tribes scattered abroad*, James wrote to the Jews of the *diaspora* and not to Jews who had made a profession of faith in Christ. This very obvious truth, distorted by the commentators, made the book of James come alive and dispelled the notion there was a difference of opinion between James and Paul.

It is this unrecognized fact that James wrote to Jews and not to Christians that has perpetuated the confusion surrounding the book. We must remember the Jews, as well as Christians, are the elect of God. The Jews had been the custodians of the truth until *their house was left unto them desolate*. The faith that had been committed to their trust is the faith that has been committed to our trust. They had been given the law to bring them to Christ, that they might

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be justified by faith, and this faith had been foreshadowed in the sacrificial system, which they also corrupted. Thus David wrote:

Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompence unto them: let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway. (Romans 11:9-10)

The difference between the faith committed to the Jews and the faith committed to the church is point of time. They were the writers of all of the Old Testament Scriptures, which contain *the faith once delivered unto the saints*. This faith was to find its realization in Jesus Christ in the fullness of time. The sad part was Israel had become so steeped in their traditions and a corruption of the faith which had been delivered unto them that they did not recognize Jesus of Nazareth to be the Christ, promised in their Scriptures. Thus their *house was left unto them desolate*. With this the faith was committed unto the church, all of which were Jews until about fifteen years after the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of our Lord from the dead.

There is a theory which has arisen because of the assumption James wrote to Christians. This theory declares James wrote much earlier than Paul, before Paul's theology of salvation by grace apart from the deeds of the law had been fully developed. This theory borders on blasphemy. It completely denies the inspiration of Scripture by an omniscient and immutable God and requires God to act contrary to the revelation of Himself in the Scriptures. The Bible clearly states *God is not the author of confusion*. When there is confusion regarding the Scriptures, it is the result of the misunderstandings of men and not because of the Scriptures themselves. A proper view of the Scriptures through the attributes of God, as well as the rules of interpretation, will enable us to steer the course of *rightly dividing the word of truth*.

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Once I came to understand James did not write to Christians, I had the key to unlock the book so that the difficulties in the book of James vanished. Once I understood James wrote to unsaved Jews, it became obvious James was written as an aid to evangelize the Jews of the *twelve tribes scattered abroad*. This piece of information provided the key to harmonize Paul's statements about the grace of God with James's statements about the law. It also enabled me to see James fully understood and believed in the gospel of the saving grace of God apart from the deeds of the law.

At the time of the writing of the epistle of James, James was not legalistic and formal as the commentators have said. There is no doubt James and the church at Jerusalem clung to things Jewish for a number of years. This was quite natural because they were all Jews or Jewish proselytes. However, when the gospel began to go to the Gentiles, they were forced to rethink their position as Peter did when the Lord told him to *Rise Peter, kill and eat*. As they grew in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord, they began more and more to divorce themselves from things Jewish, but this took a considerable amount of time. Despite this, by the time James wrote his epistle, James fully understood the believer's, as well as the Jew's, relationship to the law. Consequently James used the law in his epistle as our Lord and the apostle Paul used it; he used the law *lawfully* in its *schoolmaster* role to bring the Jews to Christ so that they might be *justified by faith*.

Once I understood James did not write to Christians, the mask which veiled the book of James was removed. I sincerely hope *Removing The Mask* will remove the mask of misunderstanding and ignorance that has shrouded the book of James. I hope it will do for you what it has

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done for me. If it does so, it will reveal James is a wonderful book. It is a book which is in complete alignment with the teachings of the apostle Paul, and there was no schism between them. When we understand James, it will teach us something of human nature and religion. It will teach us something about a people (the nation of Israel: the natural brethren of both James and Paul) *who were ignorant of God's righteousness and went about trying to establish their own righteousness.*

These people, whether they are the Jews of the diaspora to whom James wrote or someone in your community who works hard at religion, are ignorant of the grace of God that is available in Christ Jesus. These people work hard in an attempt to make themselves fit for the presence of God. They may give lip service to faith in Jesus Christ, but they have never fully submitted to the gospel of the saving grace of Jesus Christ. These are the people of James's epistle, which makes the book of James an aid in evangelistic attempts to reach the unsaved religious folk of James's day, as well as ours.

It was written to cause the Jews to examine their faith in the light of the events that had taken place in Jerusalem when Christ died for their sins according to the Scriptures, which fulfilled all that was written by *Moses and all of the prophets* concerning the Lord Jesus Christ in His Person and work.

Dale Andre, D.D.



## Chapter I

### THE TWELVE TRIBES SCATTERED ABROAD

There are three men in the New Testament named James. James, the son of Alphaeus, James, the brother of John, and James, the half brother of our Lord. The church historian Eusebius tells us James, the half brother of our Lord, was the first bishop of Jerusalem (*The History of the Church*, Eusebius, Dorset Press, 1965, Translated by G.A. Williamson, page 72), and tradition tells us he was the writer of the epistle which bears his name. This James served as the bishop of the church at Jerusalem during the period of time when the apostle Paul made his three missionary journeys into Asia and for some time thereafter (ibid, page 118).

The church at Jerusalem, which James came to pastor, was made up entirely of Jews, or Jewish proselytes, for the better part of its existence. This church grew rapidly from the one hundred and twenty who were gathered together after the Lord's ascension to over three thousand on the day of Pentecost. A short time later five thousand were added to the church (Acts 4:4), and others were added daily as they were saved (Acts 2:47).

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The fact that all of the members of this church were Jews, or Jewish proselytes, explains why this church was steeped in things Jewish well after Paul's third missionary journey into Asia. This can be seen in James's remarks to Paul, when Paul came to Jerusalem at the completion of his third missionary journey. At that time James said, *Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law* (Acts 21:20).

James's zeal for the law, at this juncture of his ministry, nearly got the apostle Paul killed when he encouraged Paul to purify himself in the temple with four Jewish brethren. It is inexplicable why the apostle Paul agreed to James's request, given the fact Paul had already written his epistle to the Galatians, and Paul would write the book of Romans during his imprisonment at Caesarea following the incident in the temple at Jerusalem. Both of these epistles reveal clearly that the believer is reckoned dead to the law. As difficult as it is to understand why Paul would act contrary to what he knew to be true, the Lord used the events in Jerusalem to aid discerning believers in their understanding of their self-willed capabilities. Even so, despite the confusing nature of these events, the Lord worked them out together for good as the Scriptures promise (Romans 8:28).

It was sometime after Paul's incarceration by the Romans at Jerusalem when James wrote his epistle *to the twelve tribes scattered abroad*. This is readily discerned when it is understood that James wrote to unsaved Jews and not to Christians. In dealing with the unsaved Jews of the *diaspora*, he used the law as it was intended to be used -- as a *schoolmaster* to bring the Jews unto Christ that they might be justified by faith. James's statements about the faith of his audience and their relationship with Jesus Christ is based on their covenant relationship with God, and must not

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be misconstrued to be statements to a Christian audience.

In dealing with these Jews of the *diaspora*, James alluded to their double-mindedness. This suggests they had been made aware of the truth of the gospel, but were still vacillating between Judaism and Christianity. They were much like the Jews who were addressed in the book of Hebrews. The fact that James addressed them as *brethren* does not demand they were his Christian brethren. *Brethren* was a common term used by the Jews to refer to other Jews. All of them were, after all, of the *seed of Abraham* after the flesh.

James's ministry to these Jews can be compared to our Lord's ministry to the Jews. In the fifteenth chapter of the book of Romans, Paul tells us Christ was a *minister of the circumcision*. This means He ministered to Jews by their covenant relationship with God, based upon the law. Our Lord always directed the Jews, who inquired about entrance into the kingdom of God, of their covenant responsibility to the law. Further He increased their condemnation by showing them the law could be violated mentally as well as physically. He directed those condemned by the law to take up their cross (the sign of a curse) and follow Him. He used the law as it was intended to be used, to drive the Jews to Himself so that they might be justified by faith. Because *by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin* (Romans 3:20). This practice would be very evident in our Lord's dealings with the Jews if commentators of reputation (like Scofield and Chafer) had not declared our Lord's sermon on the mount and ministry in general to be instructions for the future Kingdom age.

James understood the grace of God perfectly well. There was no question in his mind, salvation was by faith apart from the deeds of the law. The council at Jerusalem, at which he

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testified, proves he understood this principle in dealing with Gentiles, but it took him a little longer to understand this principle with Jews. However the book of James proves he came to know how to use the law in dealing with Jews. Even so, James's use of the law and his statements about good works has brought the assumption he was legalistic.

Despite this, a proper understanding of the book of James will reveal James made no attempt to establish the concept of righteousness by the deeds of the law. The law cannot produce righteousness. The law was not and is not a means of life. The law was a ministry of condemnation and death. Paul testified to this truth in the third chapter of his second epistle to the Corinthians. The purpose of the law was to establish guilt and condemnation -- to establish the absolute need of a Savior: *Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith* (Galatians 3:24).

If one reads only the Old Testament and the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) in the New Testament, he will be reading that portion of the Bible which was governed by God's covenant relationship with Israel, based upon the law. After the Gospels comes the book of Acts, which is a transition from the Jewish age of a covenant of law to the present new covenant relationship in Jesus Christ. This means that more than two-thirds of the Bible is presented under the covenant of the law. It is of extreme importance then that we understand the purpose of the law in God's redemptive plan.

No one was ever saved by the law (the old covenant). The hope of salvation was in God's new covenant (which was portrayed in the sacrificial system and fulfilled in Jesus Christ). Thus the new covenant relationship was charged to all Old Testament saints (those who believed the

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promise of God) after Christ was crucified, buried and risen from the dead, at which time *he led captivity captive* and took their souls out of Paradise and into heaven. Thus all Old Testament saints are seen in the New Testament without a single sin remembered against them. The reason for this is seen in Hebrews chapters ten, where we have the terms of the new covenant, and in chapter eleven, where we see the new covenant applied to those who lived by faith.

Paul told the Galatians the law *was added by reason of transgressions till the Seed* [Christ] *should come*, and he instructed Timothy in the proper use of it when he wrote:

As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do. Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: from which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling: desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.

But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind [homosexuals], for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust. (I Timothy 1:3-11, emphasis mine)

Paul's statements to Timothy about the proper use of the law prove a grave error is committed if one thinks he can be justified before God by the deeds of the law. This was the error of Judaism. The Jews entered into this error just sixty days after they had been delivered from Egypt through the blood of the Passover lamb (which is a type of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ). The Jews' fault in declaring, *All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do*, does not impugn the sanctity and purity of the law. It declares a lack of understanding of themselves. They did not discern their base nature and inability to keep the law.

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The writer of the book of Hebrews called the day they made this declaration *the day of provocation in the wilderness*. In other words it was the day when the Jews provoked God by rejecting His grace and desiring to establish their own righteousness.

In the tenth chapter of first Corinthians, Paul called this incident an act of *unbelief* and *idolatry*. Once the Jews entered into the covenant of the law, they tried to turn this ministry of death into a ministry of life. This became evident in the traditions of the elders. The elders corrupted the law by interpreting it in a manner which gave them a sense of fulfilling it. These Rabbinical interpretations removed the condemnation of the law, making the law impotent to do what it was designed to do: act as a *schoolmaster* to bring the Jews unto Christ. Thus the Jews' view of the law became a vehicle which produced a feigned righteousness, hypocrisy and a vain faith.

It is this error in the thinking of the Jews that James knew very well. Therefore this is the error which James addressed in his epistle. Once James exposed this error, then he could redirect the Jews to the saving grace that is in Christ Jesus. Consequently James is not a Christian epistle. James is a Jewish epistle written to change the minds of the Jews of the *diaspora* and bring them to faith in Christ.

## Chapter II

### LET PATIENCE HAVE HER PERFECT WORK

The Jews had some peculiar ideas. One of them was their belief that God tempted them with sin. This was the Rabbi's answer to mankind's sin nature and was a not-so-subtle way of passing culpability for their sins to God. If they could attribute temptation to God, then they could feel self-satisfaction and even justification when they were tempted with evil. With this and many other methods, they went about trying to establish their righteousness before the law.

James did not attempt a frontal attack on these beliefs. Rather he used their beliefs to establish a line of reasoning which would enable him to present the gospel to the Jews. Thus he wrote:

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. (James 1:2-4)

These verses require a grammatical evaluation in the Greek language in which they were written in order for us to see that they refer to a common Jewish practice. This practice is

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addressed by James in verses thirteen and fourteen, where James wrote:

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. (James 1:13-14)

The grammar in this text reveals James did not make a command (imperative) to the Jews to be joyful when they fell into temptations, as it is translated. The word *count* in the Greek is in the aorist indicative tense. It is a past-tense statement of fact. *Fall* is in the aorist subjunctive tense. It expresses a past-tense hypothetical condition. The remaining text has been translated correctly. A free translation of verses two to four is, *My brethren, if you were at any time to fall into any kind of temptation, you counted it total joy; knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience.*

James used the fact that the Jews took pleasure in trials to introduce the idea that they ought to subject their faith to scrutiny so that they could be *perfect, and entire, wanting nothing*. This tactic is similar to that of the apostle Paul on Mars Hill. Remember the Greeks were totally steeped in idolatry. They had idols to every kind of a god imaginable. They also had an idol to the *Unknown God*. Paul did not immediately rebuke them for this folly. Rather he used it to introduce the Greeks to the true and living God, Whom they worshipped falsely.

Thus James used the Jews' misconceived ideas of temptation to introduce the idea that the trial of one's faith could have the beneficial result of making that person right before God. A superficial reading of these verses could and has produced the idea that James wrote to a Christian audience. However an exegetical look proves that James wrote to Jews of the *diaspora*, who were steeped in the *traditions of the elders*.

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Thus *My brethren* is used by James in the sense of *My Jewish brethren*. And the joy which the Jews experienced when they fell into various temptations was used to get his *brethren* to test their Jewish faith. This led him to say, *But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing* (James 1:4).

A tested faith, which produces patience (experience), will establish whether that faith is viable and true or whether it is simply empty religion. At this point we must not forget that prior to the church age, the Jews were the custodians of *the faith*. Nevertheless, through various means, that *faith* had become corrupted and apostate. The truth of the gospel, which had been revealed in the sacrificial system, had become so much empty ritual observed out of tradition.

The Jews were not redeemed by the animal sacrifices. Those sacrifices could never take away sin. They were redeemed by faith in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, which was represented in the animal sacrifices. It was faith in the promise of God which produced salvation then and now. Therefore if James could get the Jews to examine their faith in the light of the Word of God, it would reveal that their faith was in their vain works and not in the completed work of Christ, thus establishing the truth of James' s statement that *patience* [experience] *would have its perfect work, so that they could be complete and entire, wanting nothing*.

James was not creating a vacuum. After convincing the Jews of their vain faith, he was ready to supply the truth of the gospel which had been revealed in Judaism, but was now hidden because of the apostasy. In Christ the Jews could come to understand that there was no further need of the temple, or the sacrifices, or of the law. With maturity in Christ, the Jews could come to understand that they were complete in Christ, needing nothing. Therefore all of the traditions

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handed down by Rabbinical interpretation could be abandoned in Christ.

### Chapter III

## IF ANY OF YOU LACK WISDOM

Many of the Jews of James's day believed if they were tempted, they were tempted of God. This was an error, as James pointed out in his letter to the Jews of the *diaspora*. Even so James used their pride of accomplishment and joy of endurance to speak to their hearts as a basis to examine their faith to see if it was, in any respect, *the faith once delivered unto the saints*. If their faith was indeed *the faith*, this alone would assure them they were *perfect and entire, wanting nothing*. If it was not, this would immediately establish their spiritual poverty. James addressed this issue when he stated: *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him* (James 1:5).

This verse presents the central theme of James's epistle. It presents it in the poetic language of Solomon, whose language should have been well known unto the Jews because, being a prophet, Solomon used wisdom in the book of Proverbs to speak of salvation in Jesus Christ when he wrote:

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Happy is the man that findeth wisdom [i.e., salvation in Jesus Christ], and the man that getteth understanding [the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God]. For the merchandise of it [salvation] is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She [salvation] is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days [eternal life] is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour [an incorruptible inheritance and glorification, reserved in heaven]. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace [the peace of God and peace with God]. She [salvation] is a tree of life to them that lay hold on her: and happy is everyone that retaineth her. (Proverbs 3:13-18)

The latter part of this quotation from Proverbs three implies, as translated, that it takes human effort to retain wisdom (salvation), but this is an unscriptural concept. In the original Hebrew, *happy is everyone that retaineth her* means *those who have her* [i.e., salvation] *are blessed*. Consequently James used the term *wisdom* to address the Jews of the Mediterranean world to bring this blessing upon them that they might enter into the truth Solomon expressed when he wrote, *For whoso findeth me* [wisdom, i.e., salvation] *findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD* (Proverbs 8:35).

Before a man will ask for wisdom from God, he must recognize his need of the Savior. Most Jews believed themselves to be justified before God by their traditions. The idea of a Savior was a stumbling Stone and a Rock of offense to them. During the ministry of our Lord *it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his [Levi's] house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him. And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners? When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Mark 2:15-17, emphasis mine).*

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The attitude of the Scribes and the Pharisees was a very prevalent attitude among the Jews. They sought to justify themselves by finding fault with others. This is the way of self-righteousness. In fact they sought to justify themselves by trying to find fault with the Lord Jesus Christ for extending His grace to the publicans and sinners with whom He ate. It is quite evident the scribes and Pharisees did not apply to themselves the truth that *there is not a just man upon the earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not* (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

All of the world needs the Great Physician. But all who are a part of this world do not, or will not, recognize their need of Him. It is only by the preaching of the Word of God and the convicting power of the Spirit of God that any of us comes to recognize our need of Him. When this occurs, through the work of the Spirit, God *giveth liberally and upbraideth not*. When God gives, He gives by grace, for the Scriptures tell us, *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast* (Ephesians 2:8-9). Despite the many covenant relationships God had with the patriarchs and Israel, salvation has always been by grace, because *there is not a just man upon the earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not*, and our Lord said, *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*.

At this point in the narrative, there is a warning how the Jews should ask. They must ask with an unwavering faith, which is only possible when the Spirit of God quickens the individual. However in that day, as in our own day, there were those who made counterfeit professions of faith -- perhaps reasoning they could hold on to the traditions of Israel with one hand and give lip service to the Lord with the other. Consequently James asserted:

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But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. (James 1:6-8, emphasis mine)

The unstable, two-faced man does not really have his trust in the Lord. He has a feigned faith. There were many in Israel who were like that. Jesus said, *This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me* (Mark 7:6b). The occasion when our Lord made this statement was when the Pharisees came accusing the disciples of eating without washing, contrary to the traditions of the elders. The Jews who accused the disciples were steeped in legalistic tradition, which had nothing to do with the truth of the Word of God. This induced our Lord to say:

Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandments of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: but ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye. (Mark 7:7-13, emphasis mine)

It is interesting to note, throughout the public ministry of our Lord, there were many in Israel who believed on Jesus. They knew Jesus was the Christ. Nevertheless they would not publicly confess Him lest they be excommunicated from the synagogue. Apparently their position in Judaism was more important to them than salvation and the truth of the Word of God.

It is safe to assume that the present-day practice of the Jews, which is to consider a Jew who has converted to Christianity to be dead, was practiced then as now. Excommunication from

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the synagogue meant banishment from Jewish society. The synagogue was the center of Jewish life. The ability to earn a living and all social intercourse centered around the synagogue, as well as acceptance of the individual by the Jewish community as a whole. Undoubtedly this is the reason the early church, which was made up entirely of Jews, found it necessary to live communally and share their wealth. They had been banished from Jewish society.

Our Lord's instructions that he who seeks to save his life will lose it has its primary fulfillment during the great tribulation period, which is yet to come. Even so there is an application of this truth to all men in every age -- towards Jesus Christ you cannot be double-minded. The wisdom promised of God requires a positive, unwavering faith in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Such a faith is the gift of the Holy Spirit of God through the preaching of the Word of God and His quickening power. It cannot be humanly generated.

But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: that the saying of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Isaiah said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Isaiah, when he saw his glory, and spake of him. Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. (John 12:37-43, emphasis mine)

The instructions of James to the Jews is predicated on his deep understanding of them as a people. James knew the emptiness of their professions and the shallowness of their understanding. James knew the Jews sought to establish their own righteousness before God. He knew the Jews rejected the concept of imputed righteousness. Therefore James made the terms of his presentation to the Jews very plain. He preached to them as our Lord had preached to them. It

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was incumbent upon James to show the Jews they were under the condemnation of the law, which he used lawfully, to make the Jews to whom he wrote receptive to the grace of God. Consequently the method of James with the Jews of the *diaspora* was akin to the method of our Lord with the rich young ruler:

And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying and went away grieved: for he had great possessions. (Mark 10:17-22, emphasis mine)

According to the eighth verse of the fifteenth chapter of Romans, Christ was a minister to the circumcision, which means He ministered to the Jews. This ministry was predicated of law because of the Mosaic covenant. Consequently everything Jesus preached and said to the Jews during his public ministry must be understood in the light of the Mosaic Covenant. This is the reason our Lord told the rich young ruler, who asked how to inherit eternal life, to keep the law. Our Lord used the law in its *schoolmaster* role to bring the young man unto Christ, that he might be justified by faith.

It must be understood, the Jews could not be justified by the law any more than Gentiles can. Even so the Jews' covenant relationship required obedience to the law. Once the law established the guilt of its offenders, then the offenders were to make the appropriate sacrifice, declaring their faith in the Kinsman Redeemer Who was to come. This is how the law worked as a *schoolmaster* to bring them to Christ so that they might be justified by faith. This concept of

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the law was almost totally lost to the Jews of the first century. The traditions of the elders had obscured the concept of a Kinsman Redeemer by establishing self-righteousness through Rabbinical interpretations of the law.

The young man who had come inquiring of our Lord the things necessary to inherit eternal life was no doubt steeped in the commandments and doctrines of men. When he was confronted with keeping the ten commandments, he asked, *Which?* Then our Lord quoted five of the last six commandments, dividing one into two parts, but omitting the commandment which dealt with covetousness. The young man replied, *All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet* (Matthew 19:20)?

The young man must have known he was not perfect before the law. Otherwise he never would have asked the question, *What shall I do to inherit eternal life?* Nor would he have responded, *What lack I yet?* Apparently the young man wanted our Lord to tell him he was just before the law, even though, subconsciously, he must have known he was not. Our Lord invoked the lawful use of the law with him, but He used only those commandments which had to do with man's relationship with man and said nothing to him about man's relationship with God. Then our Lord answered the second inquiry of the young man: *Sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come take up the cross, and follow me.* With this statement our Lord reached into the young man's heart and proved him guilty of covetousness.

James tells us, *Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.* The law required a perfect performance for justification. Since *there is not a just man*

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*upon the earth, that doeth good and sinneth not*, no one can be just before the law. This is why our Lord said to the young man, *Take up the cross, and follow me*. Under the covenant relationship which God had with the nation of Israel, the cross was a sign of a curse. In effect He said to the young man, *You are cursed by the law, follow me for grace*. Paul quoted this aspect of the Jews' covenant relationship with God to the Galatians, to divert them from their perverted interest in the law because of the Judaizers, when he wrote: *For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them* (Galatians 3:10, emphasis mine). And he also wrote: *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree* (Galatians 3:13, emphasis mine).

This means: *the following of Jesus* can only be done by grace. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Kinsman Redeemer promised in all of the sacrifices from the garden of Eden to the cross of Calvary. Under the terms of the covenant of law, a sacrifice for sin was made when the law had been violated. The young man should have understood what Jesus meant when He said, *Take up your cross and follow me*, but at the time, apparently, he did not.

The young man was double-minded. The Scripture says, *a double minded man is unstable in all his ways*. So the young man rejected his only means of justification by clinging for hope to the law which condemned him. This is the kind of thinking that James addressed in his epistle. This type of thinking is not common only to the Jews. It is very prevalent among the Gentiles as well. Man seeks to be justified by his own behavior, rather than by the grace of God, knowing full well his behavior condemns him before a Just and Holy God.

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Regarding the young man, the Scripture says Jesus loved him. Nevertheless Jesus had to let him go. The inexorable Word of God declares there is only one way to enter into eternal life. It is by grace through faith in the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing can change this, not even the love of Christ for an individual sinner, unless that sinner comes unto God by Him.

God in His infinite Love and Grace has made provision for man through the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. This was accomplished in the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God before the foundation of the world and shall be completed through the death, burial, resurrection and return of our Lord to this earth. Thus the salvation that is available in Jesus Christ is the only means by which God can be Just and the Justifier of him who does no more than believe in Jesus. This plan of salvation, of which Christ is the Author and Finisher, satisfies God's Holiness, Righteousness and Justice, as well as His Love, Mercy and Grace.

## Chapter IV

### THE RICH MAN SHALL FADE IN HIS WAYS

The Jews of the *diaspora* to whom James wrote were shown their need of salvation by James's reference to the wisdom of God. He revealed this kind of wisdom could not be obtained by those who vacillated from one position to another. In this age the true believer, through the preaching of the Word of God and the quickening power of the Spirit of God, has been given the gift of faith in Jesus Christ, as well as the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of God performs many ministries to the believer and through the believer. He is an *Earnest*, or pledge, from God to the believer to assure him God will fulfill all of His promises to him. He is an ever-present Help, causing the believer both *to will and to do of His good pleasure*. He was the One Who caused *holy men of old to write* the Word of God by inspiration of the Spirit, which means the Scriptures were God *breathed*. Therefore a *walk in the Spirit* is a walk of faith which will not, yea which cannot, deviate from the truth of the Word of God and is accomplished by faith through the gifts of the Spirit, energized by the Spirit.

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The true believer is able to come *unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ* to attain a level of maturity in Christ, through the preaching and teaching of the Word of God and the quickening ministry of the Spirit of God. However babes in Christ (who have not yet matured in the Lord) can be carried about by every wind of doctrine the Devil brings their way through the deceit of men. Most of the Jews to whom James wrote were unsaved, but it is possible some of them were believers who merely lacked spiritual maturity.

James knew the Jews very well. He knew each of their arguments and opinions would have to be disarmed even before they were expressed. Thus he wrote:

Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: but the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. (James 1:9-11)

This statement was designed to counteract the Jews' belief that the possession of riches was evidence of the approbation of God. The Jews put great stock in the individual who was rich, and so does this world's system. It matters not the subject: religion, politics, the natural world, according to the song, *When you're rich, they think you really know*. This attitude was another of the many components of the Jewish mind. This mind had been shaped by many years of traditional misinterpretations of the Scriptures. Since the law promised blessings for performance and curses for nonperformance, it was assumed wealth was a reward for righteousness and poverty, or physical maladies, a judgment. Despite the Jews' point of view and that of the world, our Lord taught, *life does not consist in the abundance of things which a man possesses*:

For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mark 8:36-37)

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The attitude of the Jews toward those less fortunate than themselves is seen in the relationship of the religious rulers in Israel toward the man who was born blind:

... the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? How then doth he now see? His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: but by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself.

These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him. Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner. He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.

Then said they to him again, What did he to thee? How opened he thine eyes? He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? Will ye also be his disciples? Then they reviled him, and said, Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is.

The man answered and said unto them, Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing. They answered and said unto him, Thou was altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out. (John 9:18-34, emphasis mine)

The leaders of the Jews, for the most part, had wealth and power. They wielded their power in an unscrupulous manner. This is easily seen in their relationship with the man who had been born blind. They agreed, before ever hearing the facts, if anyone confessed Jesus to be the Christ, they would excommunicate them from the synagogue. Their attitude of superiority was clearly expressed in their statement to the man who had been blind: *Thou was altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?* This attitude had been passed from generation to generation to the Jews to whom James wrote.

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Nevertheless James sought, as Solomon of old, to change their minds and bring them to the purpose of life, which is definitely not the amassing of wealth. It makes no difference whether a man is rich or poor: *It is appointed unto man once to die*. Like the grass and the flower, natural life no sooner comes forth and blooms until it is gone. Thus Solomon wrote:

He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity. When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes? The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.

There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand. As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind? (Ecclesiastes 5:10-16)

After considering almost everything a man might conceive to be his reason for living, Solomon brought the book of Ecclesiastes to an end when he wrote:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be [of the] good [One], or whether it be [of the] evil [one]. (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

*To fear God, and keep His commandments* means: no matter what a man is, or what he has done, in order for him to come into a right relationship with God, he must hold God and His Word in reverence and believe the truth of the Word of God. This, of course, cannot be accomplished by the will of the natural man. It is a work of the Spirit of God through the preaching of the Word of God. Thus man's failed attempts at religion and law-keeping must fall to the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, which is received by God's grace through faith.

This is the reason a man can count himself happy when his *faith* is tried, for the only faith

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that can withstand being tried is *the faith*: the body of truth revealed in the Person and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is *the resurrection and the life*. An untried faith provides no tangible hope in life and absolutely no hope in death. If there is no real hope in death, we might just as well *eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die*. Therefore James continued:

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. (James 1:12-21, emphasis mine)

These remarks, it must be remembered, were spoken to the Jews of *the twelve tribes scattered abroad*. It must also be remembered that these Jews, as members of the nation of Israel, had been the custodians of the truth. The gospel, *how that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures*, had been preached to them in the sacrificial system and typology of the Old Testament Scriptures. Consequently the reception of the engrafted word, which had been a vital part of the Jews' religion before it was corrupted by the traditions of the elders, was able to save their souls. So James encouraged these Jews to receive the engrafted word and reject the foolish notions of the Rabbis.

The Rabbis taught the Jews that the evil and corruption which confronts man was of God. They taught the people that God used these things to test man's righteousness. Thus man's ability

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to shun temptation was a proving ground for his righteousness, which he obtained by the works of the law. This was the essence of rabbinical teaching. James countered these false Jewish ideas by teaching the Jews that evil is intrinsic. It is the result of a fallen nature, which is common to all mankind. Temptation is not of God, as the Rabbis said; it does not test a man and force him to greater holiness and dedication to God. Rather it provides evidence that man is a fallen creature, who cannot be justified by the deeds of the law. Consequently James wrote:

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. (James 1:13-15)

James sought to bring the Jews into a proper understanding of their relationship with God. He did this to counter the natural tendency of the Jews to cling to the past and to their traditions. Therefore James sought to get the Jews to see themselves as they really were. In most cases the trial of the Jews' faith revealed it was a vain faith. It was a faith predicated upon their dead works rather than on the immutable promises of God. It was a faith that was ignorant of God's righteousness, and one which sought to establish its own righteousness. Consequently it was a faith which had deviated from the firm foundation upon which it had been founded, so that it was no longer *the faith, once delivered unto the saints*.

James knew the weak points of the Jews' faith. He had been steeped in it until he himself had been saved. At first, he had clung to the law as if it were, in itself, a source of life. Nevertheless, like all of us, he had to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord. After nearly getting the apostle Paul killed over a Jewish vow, James was forced to rethink his position. The writer to the Hebrews undoubtedly helped him much in that direction:

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But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. (Hebrews 9:11-17, emphasis mine)

If the Jews' faith was genuine, it would have provided them with a crown of life; if it was genuine, their conscience would have been purged from dead works. So the task of James was to bring his Jewish brethren, *the twelve tribes scattered abroad*, into a viable relationship with Jesus Christ: to understand that it was He Who was able to begin at Moses and the Prophets and expound unto His disciples, in all the Scriptures, the things concerning Himself.

The period of time in which James wrote was towards the end of time spanned by the book of Acts. He wrote during a period of transition, when the Jews, who had been the custodians of the truth, were being cut off and a *wild branch*, the New Testament church, was being grafted in to be the new custodian of the truth. This did not happen all at once. In fact this transition, in which the Jews and the church both operated by the authority of God, spanned about forty years, until Israel ceased to exist as a nation and the temple was destroyed.

After the destruction of the temple, there was no longer a place of sacrifice to typify the ministry of the promised Messiah. The law, all righteousness and the sacrificial system had been fulfilled by our Lord Jesus Christ, so that there was no longer a reason for them. The authority

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of the church had been fully established by the apostles *with signs and wonders and gifts of the Holy Spirit*. This authority was certainly not recognized by the majority of the Jews; but for those whose hearts had been made receptive by the Holy Spirit, it was evident the message the church preached was in fulfillment of all that had been promised in the various covenants of the Old Testament, which pointed to the cross of Calvary. This was not a new faith, but a culmination of *the faith which was once delivered unto the saints*.

Our Lord said, *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*. Consequently the Old Testament saint was saved by faith in the promise of God portrayed in the shadows and types of the sacrificial system. Once Christ had come and fulfilled the shadows and types, some of the Jewish believers, like James, had mixed emotions. They were drawn between their old habits in Judaism and the fulfillment of the truth in Christ. The book of Hebrews was written for the specific purpose of solving the misunderstandings of the Jews. James, who had had some misunderstandings of his own, was now fully settled in the faith and wrote to the twelve tribes, scattered abroad, to evangelize them.

In the book of Hebrews we learn Old Testament saints were counted under the new covenant, the same as believers in this church age, after our Lord was crucified, buried and risen from the dead. Further, comparing the book of Ephesians with the book of Hebrews, we learn the souls of the Old Testament saints, who had died looking forward to the promise of God, were taken into heaven when our Lord *led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men*.

The redeemed of the Old Testament are seen in the twelfth chapter of the book of Hebrews as the *souls of just men made perfect*, and they are also seen in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews

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as, *they without us could not be made perfect*. They could not be made perfect without us because Christ had not yet died; but when He died, He was glorified in resurrection and could then perfect them, as well as us, when He *led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men*. This explains why not a single sin of an Old Testament saint is recorded in the eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrew, or anywhere else in the New Testament for that matter. Despite the ages, or covenants under which they lived, by the judicial reckoning of God through the blood of Christ, *Their sins and iniquities will I remember against them no more*.

All of this has been made possible by the promises of God, which were fulfilled in Christ, so that when our Lord *led captivity captive and gave gifts to men*, though not directly stated, it is implied that the Old Testament saints were baptized with the Spirit of God, because *if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*. In the great commission, recorded in the book of Mark, our Lord said, *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved*. This baptism cannot be ritual baptism, but the baptism of the Spirit because Paul wrote:

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Ephesians 4:4-6)

To properly understand these verses, they should be read without reference to the Old Testament or the New Testament. Our God is an immutable God, so whether you are in the Old Testament or the New Testament, *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all*. Reading these verses in the light of the immutability of God, we should certainly understand that Old Testament saints were saved by faith in the promise of

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the coming Savior, but they could not be baptized by the Spirit then, because *Christ was not yet glorified*.

James continued his evangelistic efforts to the Jews by telling them to be *slow to speak and slow to wrath, for the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God*. Thus James encouraged the Jews to be like the Jews at Berea of whom the Apostle Paul spoke:

These [Berean Jews] were more noble than those [Jews] in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. (Acts 17:11)

James did not want the Jews, to whom he wrote, to be like the majority of the Jews, who were quick to speak and quick to wrath. Most of the Jews would not keep their mouths shut long enough to hear the Word of God. Rather than responding in faith, most of the Jews responded in wrath. The ones who did so were like those Jews who hounded Paul's steps at Lystra during Paul's first missionary journey, where they enlisted the efforts of the citizenry and stoned Paul for his proclamation of the gospel. They then dragged Paul's body to the dump, where they left him for dead. If those Jews, who stoned Paul, had received the engrafted word, which Paul had preached to them, it would have saved their souls; but in their RELIGIOUS ZEAL, they would not hear it.

## Chapter V

### THE PERFECT LAW OF LIBERTY

It is commonly believed, both inside and outside of the canopy of Christianity, that the law was given by God to establish an ideal moral code around which man should base his life. The law of Moses has indeed established perfect ideals; but it should be evident that it has always been impossible for any man, saved or unsaved, to perform the law perfectly. This is especially true because of our Lord's interpretation of the law. He showed, in His sermon on the mount, the law could be violated by thoughts as well as by deeds. This was not teaching for the kingdom age as some theologians have suggested, but it is the *lawful* use of the law: to magnify transgressions so that the law could act as a *schoolmaster* to bring the Jews unto Christ, that they might be justified by faith, for:

... by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his [God's] sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:20)

The reason for this is, *there is not a just man upon the earth that doeth good and sinneth not* (Ecclesiastes 7:20). When Adam sinned, he immediately died spiritually, and he began to die

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physically. This legacy of spiritual and physical death has been passed on to every member of Adam's race, because God deemed Adam, as the head of the race, to have acted for the entire race when he sinned. Thus every child born into this world has been born *dead in trespasses and in sin*.

This means every child born into this world has been born with a sin nature. This nature is evident even in the new-born. The Scripture says *they are liars from their mother's womb*. Additionally, every child born into this world is subject to a corrupted sense of morality. This morality was not from God, as has been supposed, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Solomon described this morality as *a way which seemeth right unto a man*. Consequently the natural man's disposition is to think he can be justified before God by the works of his own hands. So Paul wrote to Timothy about the *lawful* use of the law: *it was not made for a righteous [saved man], but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners...*

In dealing with the Jews, both personally and in His sermons, the Lord did not interpret the law as the Rabbis did, but He intensified the law to condemn all who thought they were justified by its performance. The Jews' covenant relationship with God demanded that they perform the law, but the Rabbis' interpretations of the law had removed the convicting power of the law. So when the rich young ruler inquired of the Lord how to enter the kingdom, the Lord used the law *lawfully* to produce conviction and condemnation. Then He said, *Take up your cross [the sign of a curse, because Cursed is every one who continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them] and follow me*. This was an invitation to salvation by grace through faith, which prior to the cross was manifested in offering a sacrifice for sin by faith,

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trusting that God would provide the promised Redeemer in the fulness of time.

It should be noted, the Jews' desire to be justified by the deeds of the law was clearly an act of provocation and unbelief according to the book of Hebrews, chapters three and four. The Jews committed this act of unbelief and provocation just sixty days after they had been redeemed out of Egypt by the blood of the Passover Lamb, which was clearly a portrayal of salvation by God's grace through faith. There was, obviously, no merit expressed in the Jews' deliverance from Egypt. God said, *When I see the blood, I will pass over you.* On the night of the passover judgment, all God looked for was the application of the blood, placed by faith on the door posts and lintels of the houses in which the Jews resided. If the blood was there, they were delivered by the grace of God through faith in the blood of the Passover lamb, which represented the blood of Christ. It is the blood of Christ which cleanses the believer from all sin. Therefore a desire on the part of a believer to express his own righteousness, rather than resting in the righteousness of Christ, is clearly a self-willed act of unbelief.

In the book of Romans, Paul stated that the Jews were ignorant of the righteousness of God. The Righteousness of God is more than an attribute of God; it is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Since the Jews corrupted the law to the point that it no longer convinced them of sin, they saw no need of a Savior in Jesus Christ. The Jews in their ignorance went about trying to establish their own righteousness by their self-efforts at law-keeping. To counter the Jews' erroneous ideas of law-keeping, James said:

... be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth

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therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. (James 1:22-25, emphasis mine)

When the Jews spoke of keeping the law, it was not the law as delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai, it was the law as traditionalized by the Rabbis. As we have already seen, the Rabbis had reduced the law to a worthless system of traditions, which produced a sense of self-righteousness in those who observed them. Consequently their traditions made the Word of God of none effect, so that our Lord said: *Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men* (Mark 7:7). And again, He said: *Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition* (Mark 7:9). And again, after our Lord described how the Rabbis explained the requirements of the law away, He said: *And ye suffer him no more to do aught for his father or his mother; making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye* (Mark 7:12-13).

Apparently when the Jews read the law or heard the law, many of them experienced conviction until they arrested their convictions with the traditions of the elders. This allowed their sense of conviction to give way to a false sense of well-being. James wished to change their minds. He wished to bring those who were *forgetful hearers of the word* to the place where they were *doers of the work*. The *doers of the work* was not another ethical system. The Jews certainly did not need that. It was salvation in Jesus Christ, and the *doers of the work* were believers in Jesus Christ. Our Lord said, *This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent* (John 6:29). Thus belief in the Lord Jesus Christ is expressed in James's statement:

... whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. (James 1:25)

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Our Lord said, *Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.* The law could not free a man; it could only enslave him. Consequently the law of Moses could never be called the *perfect law of liberty*. The law of Moses was a law of condemnation and death. This is seen in Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians:

Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. (II Corinthians 3:2-9, emphasis mine)

The book of James could not have been written to Jewish Christians as so many have supposed. If it were, James used the law unlawfully and was a preacher of *another gospel*; but this was not the case. The only fault with James's letter is not in the letter, but in those who have presumed it was written to Christians, rather than to *the twelve tribes scattered abroad*.

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul argued for justification by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Then, in the seventh chapter, he described an incident in his life when, after his salvation, he put himself again under the law and the law immediately condemned him:

For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, [the] sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life [as a schoolmaster], I found to be unto death. For [the] sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But [the] sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that [the] sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.

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For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under [the] sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but [the] sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but [the] sin that dwelleth in me.

I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of [the] sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. (Romans 7:9-25, emphasis mine)

After Paul cried, *O wretched man that I am!* He knew the answer, *I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.* All of Paul's sins were forgiven because of the one sacrifice for sin that had been made by the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's experience in the seventh chapter of Romans is common to everyone who has been saved -- who thinks now that he is saved, he can perform the law. This inclination is in believers because of the sin of Adam, which is identified in Scripture as the flesh. It is also identified by Solomon as *a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.* Further it is identified in the Romans text by sin in the singular, preceded in the Greek text by the definite article. After Paul realized his condemnation had been borne by the Lord, he said, *So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.*

The source of Paul's condemnation in chapter seven of Romans is addressed at the beginning of chapter eight. There is no condemnation from the Lord for those who are in Christ, who walk by faith, in dependence upon the Spirit, but there most certainly is self-condemnation from a failed performance of the law, instigated by the flesh. Consequently Romans eight, verses

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one and two, supply the answer to Paul's experience in Romans chapter seven:

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh [the law], but after the Spirit [the faith]. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of [the] sin and death. (Romans 8:1-2)

Please note: I have inserted in brackets *the law* after the word flesh and *the faith* after the word Spirit in my quotation of Romans 8:1-2. The reason for this comes from Galatians chapter three, where Paul equated the works of the law, in verse two, with the flesh, in verse three: *This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?* (Galatians 3:2-3) When we couple this truth with a statement of the apostle Paul, also found in Galatians chapter three, we have the whole picture: *The just shall live by faith, and the law is not of faith.*

Thus looking into the perfect law of liberty is looking into the saving grace of Jesus Christ as found in the gospel. It becomes evident then, there was a law of condemnation and there is a law of liberty. With respect to the latter, the apostle Paul wrote the Galatians: *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage [i.e, the law]* (Galatians 5:1).

James did not tell Christians to be diligent in their observance of the law. James told the Jews, who had looked into the law of Moses and beheld what manner of persons they were, to appropriate the grace of God by faith in Jesus Christ. If a Jew looked into the law of Moses and saw what manner of man he was, how tragic it would have been for him to continue in the traditional observances of the law. If he continued in the traditions of the elders, he could only

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be described as *a forgetful hearer* and not a *doer of the work*.

Now that we have considered the arguments of James and Paul, it should be evident that the gospel of the saving grace of Jesus Christ is *the perfect law of liberty*. In the law of liberty the Lord Jesus Christ has fulfilled every jot and tittle of the law in behalf of the believer. Consequently, by judicial reckoning, he is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work. Thus, according to the book of Hebrews, he has entered into God's rest:

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us [be eager] therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. (Hebrews 4:9-11)

Peter described the Jews in their relationship to the law in the council at Jerusalem and pleaded that the law should not be imposed upon the Gentiles: *Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they* (Acts 15:10-11, emphasis mine). Thus the *law of liberty*, as used by James, is equivalent to the grace of God, as used by Peter and Paul. Thus Paul wrote: *But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life* (Titus 3:4-7).

Thus, with James, we make an appeal to those who are religious, but lost, like the Jews of the twelve tribes scattered abroad: Look into the law of Moses and let it reveal to you what manner of person, before God, you really are. Remember, in His sermon on the mount, the Lord

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told the Jews the requirement to be justified by the law: *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.* Then allow the law of Moses to be a schoolmaster (an attendant slave who educated children) to bring you into the perfect law of liberty by faith, which is the saving grace of God, through the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ in your behalf as a sinner, believing that *Christ died for your sins according to the Scriptures and was buried and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,* thus to be deemed *a faithful doer of the work.*

## Chapter VI

### PURE RELIGION IS THIS

For me, the word *religion* brings a negative connotation to mind. The reason for this is all of the religions of the world are false, with the exception of Biblical Christianity, which to my mind is technically not a religion. Thus James differentiated, writing *pure religion is this*. Religions are *after the commandments and doctrines of men*. Religions have their roots in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and are firmly entrenched in *a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death*. Consequently the religions of this world are the many and varied concepts of mankind concerning the worship of God, or as defined by Webster, *the gods*.

Though few of us have had the opportunity to travel the world, most of us have been to Jerusalem via television. By this medium we have likely witnessed a member of the Hasidim (an orthodox sect of the Jews) weeping and intoning his prayers before Jerusalem's western wall. His head would have been adorned with curled earlocks hanging beneath a hat, or skullcap, called a

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*yarmulke*, or *kippah*. He would have worn a prayer shawl, which the Jews call a *tallit*, the fringes of which would have been visible beneath his coat. We would have seen him rocking rhythmically before the wall. At some point in his devotions, he would have pressed a scrap of paper into the crevices of that ancient wall. The television camera could not have revealed what was written on the paper, but traditionally it would have been a request for the rebuilding of the temple; a request for the peace of Jerusalem; and a request for the coming of the Messiah. This act reveals the Jews have not yet been cured of their idolatry. They have venerated the wall (which was never actually a part of the temple, but provided a base upon which the temple was built) while rejecting the God *Who does not dwell in temples made with hands*.

One day Israel will be cured of her idolatry when she returns unto the Lord. Nevertheless during the greater part of her historical relationship with the Lord, Israel has attached the name of the Lord to the false gods of the people she did not drive from the land of Canaan. She has worshipped Baal, Moloch, Remphan and many others by ascribing the name of Jehovah to them. Her blatant idolatry can be corrected the way all idolatry is corrected: when individual Jews recognize Jesus is the Christ and confess Him as Savior and Lord, believing He died for their sins according to the Scriptures, was buried and arose again the third day, according to the Scriptures.

This is presently possible through the preaching of the gospel by believing Jews or Gentiles. Failing this, some of them will come to believe on the Lord through the preaching of the one hundred and forty-four thousand during the great tribulation. This will result in their almost immediate martyrdom. Then, at the end of the great tribulation, one-third of the nation will return from the wilderness, where the Lord will have preserved them for three and one-half

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years, to observe His second coming to the mount of Olives. When they *look upon Him Whom they pierced*, they will believe on Him to their eternal salvation.

In the New Testament the Jews who did not believe on Jesus were divided primarily into three religious sects: the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Herodians. The Pharisees were the fundamentalists of Jewry, believing many of the fundamental truths of the Old Testament Scriptures. They believed in one God; in heaven; in hell; in angels; in spirits; and they believed in the resurrection from the dead. The Sadducees were the modernist of Jewry and denied virtually all of the things the Pharisees believed. The third group, the Herodians, appear to have been fewer in number than either the Pharisees or the Sadducees, but were despised by both because of their allegiance to Rome and their belief the Christ would come from the Idumaeon family of the Herods.

It is interesting in this regard, after the nation of Israel rejected Jesus as the Christ and appealed to Pilate for His crucifixion, about fifteen years later in 44 A.D., the whole nation of Israel came to believe Herod Agrippa I was the Christ. They held this belief until after his death, which resulted from a grand coup against his close friend and former schoolmate, the emperor Claudius. Agrippa believed he was the Christ and planned to take over the whole Eastern empire of Rome to form the kingdom of God on earth, but was smitten of God at Tyre, eaten of maggots, and at the end of five days died. Luke described his death in Acts chapter twelve, and so did the Roman Emperor Claudius in a history written by him and translated by Robert Graves. (*Claudius the God*, Robert Graves; Copyright 1935, 1962; Random House, pages 315-323.) These three sects, despite their differences in doctrine, were unified in their common religious belief that a man is justified before God by the

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works of his own hands, which equates to the world's belief in *a way which seemeth right unto a man*.

If we were to argue the merits of the various religions of the world based upon their performance of religious works and religious zeal (utilizing their personal appraisals of themselves), it could be difficult, if not impossible, to determine which religious group in this world exhibits the greatest fervor for its religion. If those who profess to be Christians were to compare their lives with many of the religious groups of the world, it might be difficult to determine which group has the most rigid life style, or the greatest zeal for its particular religion. Religion is not the way into the presence of God. No religion can meet the holy, righteous and just demands of God, but God has met those demands in Jesus Christ: in His life and in His death, providing a ransom for sin. Our Lord said, *I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me*. The apostle Paul wrote:

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence. (I Corinthians 1:26-29, emphasis mine)

Thus God has provided in Jesus Christ that which is impossible for man to do for himself. This provision of God is entered into by faith and not by works of righteousness which man might do. Despite this, man is still religious and believes he can perform adequately to be accepted of God. This was the primary fault in *the way of Cain*.

Cain's way was a product of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Cain was deceived the same as Eve was deceived. The serpent convinced Eve to think and act

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independently of God. Consequently she rejected the commandment of God for the lie of the Devil. She believed she would live and not die and be like God if she disobeyed God and ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Thus by her independent thought, Eve became the mother of the first religious thoughts, which are common to all religious thoughts in that they came from *a way which seemeth right unto a man*: the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Do religious works tell us anything about the validity of a religious confession? James said they do. Not so much from the standpoint of establishing the righteousness of the individuals who are religious (that is impossible), but from the standpoint of revealing men do not live up to their own religious claims. Consequently James wrote:

If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. (James 1:26-27)

James never stopped using the law with the Jews as a *schoolmaster* to bring them unto Christ. He challenged the validity of the Jews' religion on the basis of their own claims. They claimed to love the Lord their God with all of their heart and mind and strength, and they claimed to love their neighbors as themselves. Yet they had cast disparaging remarks at our Lord to the point of crucifying Him for blaspheme; they had stoned their own prophets when they had prophesied against them; they boasted they were more righteous than the Gentiles, despite numerous occasions in their history when they had followed after the gods of the Gentiles. Further they rejected widows and orphans as being under the judgment of God for some failure before the law. They considered them cursed of God and felt no obligation, socially or morally,

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to do anything for them. They did all of these things seemingly oblivious to their actual standing before a Holy, Righteous and Just God.

How do you deal with a people in such a condition (who had a great religious tradition; a direct revelation from God, called the Bible; a revered priesthood; a glorious temple; and an impressive liturgy)? You deal with them as James dealt with the Jews in his epistle: you make them aware of their true relationship with God. To do this he used the law as a *schoolmaster* to bring them unto Christ. This was (and is) the *lawful use of the law*.

In keeping with this, our Lord summarized all He had preached to the Jews in His sermon on the mount when He said, *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect*. Thus the law demanded a perfect performance for justification, and James revealed, *For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all*. Therefore the perfection required by the law was unattainable by the works of the law. It was only attainable by the vicarious life and vicarious death of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is God. Thus in His incarnation, He fulfilled every jot and tittle of the law and all righteousness; and in His death on the cross of Calvary, He provided a perfect ransom for sin and the judicial basis upon which God has the right to justify sinners and call them saints.

Nevertheless the nation of Israel had its hopes in the vain observances of the religious traditions of the elders. They offered sacrifices with no thought of failure before the law, or the promise of a Kinsman Redeemer, but simply because of tradition. They were ignorant of God's righteousness and went about trying to establish their own righteousness, which by proper interpretation of the law could not be done. Thus Isaiah wrote of their sad condition: *Woe unto*

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*them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!* (Isaiah 5:20) And again: *To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them* (Isaiah 8:20).

The *testimony* referred to by Isaiah was the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat. The Mercy Seat promised hope to the nation of Israel in the face of their many failures under the law. Once a year God provided that an atonement, or covering, should be made upon the Mercy Seat. Thus on the Day of Atonement, the blood of a sacrificial goat was sprinkled upon the Mercy Seat. That blood provided a covering (atonement) for all that was in the Ark.

There were three items in the Ark which provided testimony to Israel's many failures: the tablets of stone containing the law; the pot of manna; and Aaron's rod that budded. Israel had failed to keep the law; they loathed the bread from heaven (which represented Jesus Christ); and they rejected the authority of the leadership of Moses and Aaron (men chosen of God) for the counsel of the two hundred and fifty princes of renown. Thus the blood sprinkled on the Mercy Seat stood as a testimony to the promise of God to provide salvation through the Kinsman Redeemer and forever blot out every transgression of those who are redeemed.

There was no possibility of a right relationship with the Lord by the observance of the empty traditions of the elders. There was only a wresting of the Scriptures to their own destruction, because the traditions of the elders sought to establish the righteousness of those who observed them. Consequently all who were steeped in their doctrines were steeped in the idea they needed no atonement. They, like Cain, believed they could stand before God on the basis of their own righteousnesses, which clearly reveals there was no *light* in them. Thus our Lord said, *If*

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*therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!* (Matthew 6:23)

James defined pure religion for the Jews. Pure religion is to visit the fatherless and widows and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. This was not a new set of instructions whereby the Jews could establish themselves as righteous; it was the lawful use of the law to show the utter bankruptcy of the Jews before the law. The last six commandments have to do with man's relationship with man, which is to love one's neighbor as oneself. So when James brought up the matter of widows and orphans, whom the Jews despised as cursed of God, it was like our Lord telling the rich young ruler to sell all that he had and give to the poor. In the case of the rich young ruler, he was proven guilty before the law by our Lord's lawful use of the law. So too were the Jews of the twelve tribes scattered abroad proven guilty by James's statement about orphans, widows and keeping oneself unspotted from the world. Our Lord:

... spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. (Luke 18:9-14, emphasis mine)

There was nothing false about James's statement to the twelve tribes scattered abroad. He simply told them what pure religion is. If we define religion as the things a man can do to bring himself into the presence of God, and if we recognize the *schoolmaster* role of the law, there is no contradiction between what James said to the twelve tribes scattered abroad and what Paul said to the Galatians:

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Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:24-26)

We have stated that no man can come into a right relationship with God by religion. We have defined religion to be man's views of what is necessary to have a right relationship with God. Since man thinks in terms of rules and regulations; and since the law as given by Moses establishes the basis of absolute righteousness; and since it is impossible for man with his fallen nature to perform the deeds of the law perfectly; and since Christ, Who is God, became a man so that He could stand in the stead of man and fulfill every jot and tittle of the law and fulfill all righteousness; and since Christ offered Himself as a ransom for sin, dying the Just for the unjust; and since the Person and work of Christ fully satisfied God's Righteousness, Justice and Holiness, as well as His Love, Mercy and Grace; a right relationship with God can be obtained through pure religion, which is the lawful use of the law to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith.

The world's system thinks in terms of its knowledge of good and evil, which it derived from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil when Adam and Eve sinned. Therefore the world's system thinks in terms of merit and reward. Every religion, except Biblical Christianity, has human effort as the basis for satisfying its god. *Pure religion*, which is Biblical Christianity, is based upon the grace of God. Grace is without favor. It is what God has done for man, not what man can do for God.

Therefore the one who has come into the truth of the grace of God is enjoined to have a metamorphosis of the mind. The apostle Paul said:

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... be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. (Romans 12:2-3, emphasis mine)

The apostle John said essentially the same thing as James in his first epistle. John said:

*Love not the world [world's system], neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him* (I John 2:15). Thus the position of *pure religion* is that it stands in the grace of God. It stands for that which God has done to make the believer accepted in the Beloved. Pure religion is not based upon human effort. It cannot be, because all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God; therefore pure religion has to be based upon the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

## Chapter VII

### THE TRANSITION

It is important for us to understand that the Jews were the custodians of the truth of God's redemptive plan for approximately fifteen hundred years prior to the first advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Old Testament Scriptures (of which Israel was the custodian) began to be written about the time that Israel became a nation and departed from the land of Egypt. They were completed about eleven hundred years later, forty-nine years after she returned to Israel following seventy years of captivity in Babylon. Thus the Old Testament was completed four hundred and thirty-four years before the crucifixion of Christ.

Israel was delivered from Egypt by the blood of the Passover lamb, which was the last of ten judgments upon the false gods of Egypt. When Israel departed Egypt she possessed an oral tradition relating to God that had been passed from father to son all the way back to Adam; and as the Spirit of God *moved holy men of old* to write, she became the possessor of the Old Testament Scriptures. The New Testament tells us *all scripture is given by inspiration of God*;

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and it tells us all of the writers of Scripture (both Old and New Testaments) were Jews, which was one of the benefits of being a Jew, according to the testimony of the apostle Paul in the third chapter of the book of Romans.

After the first Passover and the deaths of all of the firstborn in Egypt, God led Israel out of Egypt by a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. They crossed the Red Sea by the mighty hand of God and journeyed to Sinai, where God offered them the covenant of the law: *And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken, we will do* (Exodus 19:8). They did this without considering the weaknesses of the flesh, nor all of the grumbling they had done during the judgments in Egypt, nor the grumbling against Moses and the Lord on the way to Sinai. Apparently they believed they really could keep all that the Lord had spoken. In his letter to the Romans, Paul has given us a view of the Jewish mind:

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. (Romans 10:1-3, emphasis mine)

Despite their oath, or perhaps because of it, Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years. There were a few high points along the way, but mostly these years were caused by and characterized by unbelief. After the death of Moses, Israel crossed Jordan into Canaan, where her entrance into the land was characterized by the same kind of unbelief. She failed to utterly destroy the inhabitants of the land according to God's command and settled down with them. Thus, through the evil counsel of Balaam, the Jews, who could not be cursed because they were blessed, allowed their children to be cursed by their cohabitation and intermarriage with the people of the

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land and the acceptance of their false gods.

The history of Israel was never smooth. From the outset, there were periods of faithfulness, followed by unbelief; followed by outright apostasy; followed by God's judgment; followed by a period of revival; and the cycle would start all over again. Despite her cyclic behavior, God ruled the nation of Israel through the judges for four hundred and fifty years following their entrance into the land.

Nevertheless, in the days of Samuel, the Jews rejected the rule of God for the rule of a king. God told Samuel to protest solemnly, but to give them a king; and so God chose Saul to be the first king of Israel. Saul started out well as king, but then his pride lifted him up to act contrary to the truth of the Word of God; so God raised up *David, a man after God's own heart*, to be king in Israel after the death of Saul. God promised David a kingdom that will never end. This will be fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is of the seed of David after the flesh, when He returns to this earth to establish the Kingdom of God.

David reigned faithfully for forty years. When he died, Solomon, the son of David and Bathsheba, was chosen of God to reign as king. He ruled faithfully for a period of time until *outlandish women cause him to sin*. Solomon erected shrines to the many false gods of his seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. God swore to judge him for this, but postponed the judgment until after the death of Solomon for David's sake (I Kings 11:11-12). This judgment resulted in a division of Israel between Jeroboam in the north and Rehoboam in the south. The northern kingdom was called Israel, and the southern kingdom was called Judah. From the outset apostasy reigned in Israel, while Judah was somewhat faithful to the Lord. This resulted in the

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Assyrian captivity of Israel, and later, when Judah also apostatized, the destruction of the temple and the Babylonian captivity of Judah and Benjamin.

This captivity lasted for seventy years according to the prophecy of Jeremiah (29:10); and in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, Cyrus gave a decree for the Jews to return to the land of Israel (II Chronicles 36:22-23) and rebuild the city of Jerusalem and its walls. Forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty Jews, along with seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven of their servants, responded to this decree (Ezra 2:64-65). When they set about the work of rebuilding the walls and the temple according to the decree, they were met with opposition (Ezra 4:1-5) from the Samaritans. These were Jews who were not carried away into captivity and had intermarried with the other inhabitants of the land. Eventually the city of Jerusalem and the temple were rebuilt according to the decree of Cyrus and the later decree of Darius Hystaspes (Esther's husband), also a king of Persia (Ezra 4:4-5).

This temple was nothing compared to the temple that had been built by Solomon. When the Jews who had seen the former temple beheld Zerubbabel's temple, they wept (Ezra 3:12). During these years the Jews were ruled by Gentile powers. First they were ruled by the Babylonians, then the Persians, who were followed by the Greeks; and, finally, before the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, they were under the dominion of Rome.

About sixteen years prior to the birth of our Lord Jesus, Herod the Great made a pact with the Jews to rebuild, enlarge and increase the stature of Zerubbabel's temple. Herod's temple had been being renovated for forty-six years (John 2:20) at the time of the wedding in Cana of Galilee, which our Lord attended and where he changed the water into wine. It is interesting to note that

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this renovation continued until the temple was finally completed about two years before it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.

The Jews to whom James addressed his epistle were the Jews who remained in the Gentile nations where they had been scattered by years of Gentile dominion. The majority of the Jews alive today have come from families which for centuries have lived outside of the promised land. Only a remnant have remained in the land through all of its trials, or have returned to the land to be citizens of the modern state of Israel since its rebirth on May 14, 1948.

It was this scattering of Jews throughout the world which brought about the synagogue form of worship. It was this system of worship, along with the erosion of the truth in Jerusalem, which was responsible for the almost complete failure of the sacrificial system to point the Jews to faith in Christ. The *schoolmaster* role of the law required a failure before the law to be atoned for with an appropriate sacrifice. This was how the law pointed the Jews to faith in Christ. However this could not be done in a synagogue. Synagogues were meeting houses, or prayer houses, and had no Scriptural authority to offer sacrifices for sin. Each synagogue had its leader, who was generally steeped in the traditions of the elders and conveyed this tradition by adherence to the teachings of the Rabbis. Thus there was little about the Jews of the diaspora's manner of worship that could lead them to faith in Christ.

For the most part, the only connection the Jews of the twelve tribes scattered abroad had with the sacrificial system was during the three feasts in the year, which required the attendance in Jerusalem of all of the devout Jewish men of the world (Deuteronomy 16:16). These feasts were the feast of Unleavened Bread (which included Passover and Firstfruits), the feast of

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Pentecost, and the feast of Tabernacles (which was in close proximity to the feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement). The requirement for all the devout Jews to be in Jerusalem for these feasts provided (and will provide) that certain ones of them would (or will) observe the most important events in the history of Israel.

For example, during our Lord's first advent, at the feast of Unleavened Bread the Jews had the opportunity to observe the crucifixion of Christ (on the preparation of the Passover), His burial (just before the Passover Sabbath began) and His resurrection from the dead (on the feast of Firstfruits, witnessed only by Jewish believers). Then on the feast of Pentecost, fifty days after His resurrection, they had the opportunity to observe the giving of the Holy Spirit to the New Testament church, when the church spake with tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Therefore it is very likely, based upon the way the first four feasts of the Jews were fulfilled, that at the second advent of the Lord, the majority of the world's Jewry will be in Jerusalem at the time of the resurrection of the redeemed, as typified by the feast of Trumpets; the return of our Lord Jesus Christ to this earth, as typified by the high priest coming out of the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement to bring salvation to Israel; and the millennial reign of Christ, as typified by the observance of the feast of Tabernacles every year during the millennium.

The church at Jerusalem was so steeped in the traditions of Jewry, it was difficult for them to make the transition from a covenant of law (albeit a *schoolmaster*) to justification by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Old habits and a lifetime of traditions die hard. Thus James remained zealous for the law long into his ministry, and his zeal for the law was very much in evidence when Paul returned to Jerusalem after his third missionary journey into Asia. This was more than

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thirty years after the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of the Lord. It was this zeal for the law that motivated James to ask Paul to purify himself with four brethren who had made Jewish vows.

The narrative describes these four brethren at the time when they were about to end their vows. According to the sixth chapter of the book of Numbers, a vow was ended by observing eight days of purification rites. The head of the individual who made the vow was shaved on the seventh day of purification. On the eighth day the priest offered a burnt-offering, a sin-offering, and a meal-offering for the one ending the vow. This was the rite of cleansing when a vow was broken, or when the days of the vow were fulfilled.

Thus, in the book of Acts, Luke gives a clear description of the events that led Paul to involve himself (at the request of James) with four brethren in Jewish rites of purification:

And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.

And when they heard it, 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: 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. What is it therefore? The multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come.

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.

As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication. Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.

And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when

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they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul. (Acts 21:17-32, emphasis mine)

This account is all we have to determine why Paul was willing to enter the rites of purification with these brethren, which is clearly contrary to what he had previously written to the Galatians. We can only guess: Perhaps it was seeing all of the Jews in the church in Jerusalem. Perhaps it was nostalgia over being back in Jerusalem, where Paul had been trained at the feet of Gamaliel. Perhaps it was the persuasiveness of James for unity among the brethren. Whatever it was, Paul succumbed to the request despite what appears to be a clear breach of Paul's understanding.

Nevertheless the Lord worked together for good the circumstances that ensued, for the circumstances precipitated Paul's two-year imprisonment at Caesarea. This appears to be the time when the Holy Spirit moved Paul to write the book of Romans. This can be seen in the Greek text of Romans 1:13, because in that text Paul states: *But I do not wish you to be ignorant, brethren, that many times I proposed to come to you, and was hindered until the present ...* (emphasis mine). It was at Caesarea that Paul said: *I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar. Then Festus,*

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*when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go (Acts 25:10-12, emphasis mine). Therefore the evidence suggests that the book of Romans was written at Caesarea during Paul's imprisonment there.*

When we consider all of the arguments for justification by faith, apart from the deeds of the law found in the book of Romans, the book of Romans appears to be the culmination of all of Paul's battles against the Judaizers. It clearly sets forth the doctrine of justification by faith, apart from the deeds of the law, for both the Jews and the Gentiles:

Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

As he saith also in [Hosea], I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.

[Isaiah] also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved: for he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth. And as [Isaiah] said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrha.

What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; as it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on

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this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. (Romans 9:21-10:9, emphasis mine)

You may remember that Paul was insistent upon going to Jerusalem despite the warnings he received not to go. There were a series of these warnings, but each one was set aside by Paul as he slowly made his way towards Jerusalem. Finally Agabus prophesied of what would take place in Jerusalem, how that Paul would be bound (Acts 21:10-12). *Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done (Acts 21:13-14, emphasis mine).*

It is inconsistent with Paul's character and with the instructions to Christians, given to him by the Holy Spirit, that Paul would be so overtly disobedient to the will of the Lord. So perhaps Paul was instructed of the Lord to go to Jerusalem and do whatever the brethren commanded him to do, for this would set into action the events that would take place there. I realize that this is pure conjecture. There is no direct statement in Scripture to suggest it, but there must be an explanation for Paul's actions which seem to be a contradiction of principles revealed to him by the Holy Spirit: *Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster (Galatians 3:24-25, emphasis mine).* For Paul to obey the commands of the Jews at Jerusalem, no matter what they were, seems rather drastic; but given the zeal for the law held by James and the brethren at Jerusalem, it seems that nothing less than drastic actions were necessary to change

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their minds.

From a human point of view, Paul could have been killed by the Jews when they took him from the temple, and he would have been except for the intervention of God through the Roman garrison. To my mind, given Paul's character revealed in the Scriptures, Paul never would have compromised his position on the relationship of a Christian to the law, but on the surface it seems that he did. Thus, in consideration of our conjecture, God worked out together for good the events that took place in Jerusalem.

I believe the threat to Paul's life was the catalyst that awakened James and the elders in Jerusalem to the understanding of a Hebrew Christian's relationship to the law. Consequently from that point in time, James came to understand the truth that the law, the temple, and the customs (after the crucifixion of Christ) were nothing more than an exercise in dead works. This fact was punctuated by God about ten years later when the Romans destroyed the temple, and the Jews of Jerusalem were starved, killed or carried away captive. From that day the Jews have been without a temple or a nation until they were reconstituted as a nation on May 14, 1948.

Christ fulfilled all of the law on behalf of the believer. Therefore, there was no value in observing any of those things. The religious pride of the Jews had to be brought into subjection to the Word of God, and God used what appeared to be Paul's disobedience to accomplish this, and this allowed the church at Jerusalem to understand its relationship to the law. Consequently the time had come for the Jews to rest in the completed work of Jesus Christ, apart from the deeds of the law:

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us [be eager]

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therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. (Hebrews 4:9-11, emphasis mine)

After the incident in Jerusalem which nearly cost Paul his life, James and the elders at Jerusalem were compelled to rethink their position. James's letter *to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad* is the result of that rethinking. This is made evident by the fact that James's letter, when properly interpreted in the light of his audience, aligns completely with the truth of grace expressed by Paul and the other New Testament writers. Thus the book of James is a manifesto of the grace of God to the Jews *of the twelve tribes scattered abroad*.

James wished to insure that their faith was truly in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ and not in the dead works of Judaism. This was necessary because of the Jews' continued adherence to their traditions and rituals. Thus we can understand why James used the law to condemn his brethren, so that they would put no confidence in their fleshly observances of law, but that their confidence would be totally in Jesus Christ, where at last through this drastic set of circumstances, James's confidence had come to be.

## Chapter VIII

### RESPECTERS OF PERSONS ARE LAWBREAKERS

If we accept James's statement regarding his audience at face value, it will do wonders for our understanding. James addressed *the twelve tribes scattered abroad*. This should be accepted as unsaved Jews of the diaspora until such a time as internal evidence should say otherwise. This is in keeping with the rules of interpretation. It is a Scriptural course of action and should be maintained until it cannot be maintained without doing damage to the Scriptures.

If such a course of action had been taken by the commentators, then all of the supposed contradictions between James and Paul would never have arisen, but they have arisen because of assumptions drawn from the language of James. For example, in chapter two James wrote:

My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your [synagogue] a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?

Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye

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have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? (James 2:1-7, emphasis mine)

In the minds of many the beginning of this verse immediately produces the assumption James wrote to Christians because of his statement about faith in Jesus Christ. This assumption gained further support in the English-speaking world, because the translator of the book of James translated the Greek word for synagogue as *assembly*. An assembly could be associated with Christians since this is the literal meaning of the word that is translated *church*, but a synagogue would definitely be associated with the Jews. Thus in the first seven verses of chapter two of James, we are confronted with a mystery, a mystery which we will endeavor to solve.

On the one hand we have an allusion to faith in Christ (*My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons*), and on the other hand we have a direct statement of a violation of the law by a common practice of the Jews. Christians are not under the law; but since the Jews vowed to keep all that the Lord had spoken, they continue in their covenant responsibility to the law until (in this age) they are freed from it by salvation in Jesus Christ (Romans 10:4).

Did James become confused about the precepts of the gospel and the responsibilities of believers? Was James intermingling law and grace? Some have assumed that he did because of James's request of Paul, when Paul returned to Jerusalem after his third missionary journey, at which time it is evident James and the elders in Jerusalem were all zealous of the law. They believed Jews in Christ should continue to live by the precepts of the law. However this was an erroneous idea and could not become a part of the Scriptural record in opposition to the truth of

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salvation by grace, apart from the deeds of the law, as put forth by the apostle Paul. Such a proposition would deny the inspiration of Scripture, as well as the immutability and omniscience of God. Thus James and Paul who lived and wrote in the same era, if inspired of God, could not put forth diametrically opposing doctrines of salvation, and they did not.

If James and the elders at Jerusalem had thought about the law in terms of its requirements, rather than from a sentimental point of view, they would have been in agreement with Paul from the beginning, but they were not. Remember Paul wrote, *At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge* (II Timothy 4:16). Further, in His sermon on the mount, our Lord told the Jews, *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect* (Matthew 5:48).

Contrary to much that has been written about this verse, this is exactly what the law demands for justification, and man is totally unable to meet this demand. So the perfection demanded by the law had to be met by One Who was able to fulfill it perfectly. Thus in life Christ fulfilled all righteousness and every jot and tittle of the law, and in death He willingly offered Himself as a ransom for sin. Consequently the apostle Paul wrote: *I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain* (Galatians 2:21). And again: *Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work* (Romans 11:5-6).

Given the fact that both James and Paul wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, the writings of both are in agreement, but this can only be seen when we recognize James did not

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write to Jewish Christians, as so many noted theologians have said. Once we understand James's audience was unsaved Jews, all of the supposed contradictions between James and Paul disappear. Once we understand the faith of the Jews was *the faith once delivered unto the saints*, and the Lord of the Jews is also the Lord of the New Testament church, we will be well on our way to understanding the book of James. These truths stand despite the dispensational differences in God's relationship with the Jews (under law) and His relationship with the church (without the deeds of the law), and they are clearly expressed in Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Ephesians 4:3-6)

James addressed two different kinds of Jews. He addressed those who were lost, with little knowledge of the gospel or the person and work of Christ, and he addressed those who were lost, but had made an erroneous approach to Christianity by giving lip service to Jesus Christ. The latter were involved in intermingling their belief that Jesus was the Christ with a belief that a Jew must continue to live his life by the precepts of the law.

We should recognize that if there are people who claim to be Christians in this age and are not, then there certainly were people in that age who were also false professors. The parable of the tares and the wheat and the Jews *who believed on Jesus*, but not unto salvation, in the eighth chapter of the gospel of John, proves this to be true. It should not be strange then that someone like James would write to them in order to reach them with the gospel.

The common practice of the Jews to give preferential treatment to the rich and ignore the poor was clearly a violation of the royal law, *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*. Since

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believers are not under the law and are in fact counted to be dead to the law, this statement could not be directed to Christians. This fact does not suggest Christians should not treat people fairly and without bias. It merely indicates James did not write to Christians, but to a people who were still trying to establish their own righteousness by the law and were still failing in that regard. Incidentally, in this age of grace, the Jews remain under their covenant relationship with God based upon the performance of the law until they come to faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 10:4).

James knew the Jews were respecters of persons. So he used that particular characteristic to show them they were unjust in their dealings with one another. They were cowed by the rich. They honored the rich above the poor, but they continued to pretend they loved their neighbors as they loved themselves. Thus James wrote:

If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: but if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. (James 2:8-11, emphasis mine)

At this point a clarification is needed. The ten commandments were divided by the Jews into two commandments. The first, or great commandment, dealt with man's relationship with God and included the first four commandments. The second, or royal law, dealt with man's relationship with man and included the last six commandments. These two divisions are clearly seen on the occasion when a Jewish lawyer came to Jesus and:

... asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matthew 22:35-40, emphasis mine)

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When we speak of man's inability to keep the law, it is not that we are opposed to good behavior, but man's behavior, at best, can never make him fit for the presence of God. There is nothing wrong with doing the right thing. You can even feel good about doing the right thing. There is nothing wrong with that, but if you perceive your goodness to be sufficient to make you accepted of God, then you are wrong. According to James's argument, this should be self-evident, because the law demands perfection, and the least imperfection spoils the whole.

In essence James said, *It does not make any difference what sin you have committed, whether you regard it as big or little: the most minor infraction condemns you so that you cannot be justified by law.* Then he advised them, *So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.* This is the only hope for a sinner. He must be justified by the grace of God or he cannot be justified at all. Consequently all men need the grace of God because:

The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are altogether become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one. (Psalm 14:2-3)

We have already looked into the *perfect law of liberty* in James chapter one. The perfect law of liberty is, of course, the grace of God. This is the only hope for the Jew. It is also the only hope for the Gentile. James presented the grace of God to the Jews so that they might be justified freely by His grace. Despite their failures before the law, there were those Jews who persisted in claiming they were justified by the law.

These Jews were like Cain. When their offerings of human effort were proven to be inadequate, they were enraged. They were ready to kill their brother, who was more righteous than they. Cain, in a rage, made a bloody sacrifice of Abel; and Israel sacrificed the Lord Jesus

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Christ in a similar rage. Cain and Israel meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. Therefore the sacrifice of Abel typified the sacrifice of Christ. This can also be seen in Joseph when his brothers cast him into a pit. They meant it for evil, but God meant it for good (Genesis 50:20). Thus with the passage of time, Joseph became Israel's savior; and in the fulness of time, God sent forth His Son to be a vicarious sacrifice for the Jews, as well as for the Gentiles.

It was necessary for James to remind the Jews that any failure, no matter how slight, constituted a failure before the whole, with the resultant condemnation. All of the Jews' efforts to establish their own righteousness were empty and vain, and by the law, which they revered, they stood condemned. Despite this, many of them still delighted in judging one another by their traditions, thereby gaining a sense of superiority. A legalistic spirit always manifests itself by self-righteousness. It operates on the principle of accusing others and excusing oneself. This is true if one was a Jew under a covenant relationship of law, or if one is a Gentile, who merely agrees with the principles of the law:

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another. (Romans 2:14-15, emphasis mine)

This is the reason Paul told the Romans not to judge one another. If they judged one another to justify themselves, they merely added to their own condemnation, because they did the same things they condemned in others. Therefore James said: *For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment* (James 2:13).

In other words, if you want to judge a man by your traditions, unmercifully, then do not expect mercy when it comes to your own judgment. Nevertheless in the grace of God, as revealed

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in Jesus Christ, *mercy rejoiceth against judgment*. That is, Christ has borne the judgment of the believing sinner; therefore, the believer rejoices in God's mercy. Thus the Jews found themselves between the proverbial rock and a hard spot. This could not continue. They would have to abandon their empty, useless faith for a viable faith in Jesus Christ.

## Chapter IX

### FAITH WITHOUT WORKS

There are many different religious systems in the world, both in and outside of the canopy of Christianity. Ultimately the question must arise, which system is the correct system, or is there more than one correct system? If you were to question individuals from each of the religious systems of this world, they would assure you that their system is the correct system. Nevertheless if there is but One God as the Bible states, then the way to God must be God's way. The world does not think this way. It reasons according to what seems right to it (Proverbs 14:12); but the Scriptures are very clear, Jesus Christ is the only way into the presence of God (John 14:6).

We believe the Bible to be the Word of God. We believe the Bible supplies sufficient evidence to support this claim. The Bible discloses God's plan of salvation. It also discloses that God is Eternal and He is Omniscient. Therefore God's plan of salvation has been known to God for all eternity; and, of necessity, God's plan of salvation satisfies all of His attributes. Thus it satisfies His Love, Mercy and Grace without impugning His Holiness, Righteousness and Justice.

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It is a perfect plan that could only be accomplished through our Lord Jesus Christ. The fact that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, and that no man cometh unto the Father but by Him, was revealed in a conversation between our Lord and Thomas the night before Jesus was crucified (John 14:1-6); and it was proven to be true by His resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:1-4).

In the Bible we learn that all of the writers of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, were Jews. Despite this, the Scriptures do not present the Jews in a very good light. Their history is fraught with disobedience to God, rebellion and unrestrained idolatry. In fact, Israel's apostasy was so severe, she rejected and crucified her own God. Afterwards she was cut off as the custodian of the truth, and the wild olive branch has been grafted into her place for the period of the church age (Romans 11:13-25).

Thus at the present time the church, composed of Jews and Gentiles, has been made the custodian of the truth. The church will continue in this position until she also apostatizes. At the height of this apostasy, the true church (all of the redeemed of all ages) will be resurrected to heaven. Then the antichrist will counterfeit the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. He, with the apostate churches of this world, will set up a counterfeit kingdom of God upon this earth. This will bring the great tribulation period upon the earth, and during this period of time God will send one hundred and forty-four thousand witnesses (twelve thousand of each of the twelve tribes of Israel) to testify to the truth of the Scriptures upon the earth. Their ministry will replace the ministry of the resurrected church, and their ministry will continue until Jesus Christ comes to judge the antichrist and to establish His kingdom upon this earth.

Thus Israel and the church have been (and will yet be) used of God to testify to the truth

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of the Word of God. All other religious systems, as well as many in Jewry and Christianity, have fallen prey to the lie of the Devil. This lie had its beginning in the human family in the garden of Eden when Eve was deceived by it (spoken by the serpent), and when Adam willfully sinned. Thus it was in the garden of Eden that the necessity for redemption was born, and it was there that the truth of the gospel began to be revealed.

The Bible declares Adam was created in the image of God. Thus before the fall, Adam was perfect and without sin. The Bible declares that Eve was formed from a rib taken from Adam's side, so she too was perfect and without sin. Thus, having been created in the image of God, they were placed in the garden of Eden with only one commandment:

... Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof [dying, thou shalt die]. (Genesis 2:16-17)

There were many trees in the garden of Eden. All of them were good for food, but only two are named in the Scriptural account. They are the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The tree of life was there because of God. It had one role before the fall and another after. It bore God's promise of life to the one who would partake of its fruit. Thus it was the tree of life; but after the fall it came to represent the truth of the gospel, because the Lord bore our judgment on the cross of Calvary (John 3:14-15). In stark contrast to the tree of life, it appears that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (though not directly stated in Scripture) came to be in the garden of Eden because of the Devil. Thus it was used of the serpent to deceive Eve. It promised life, but it produced death. Thus it too has a double role. It was used of the serpent to present the Devil's lie to Eve; but afterwards it represents the concept it produced, a

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way which seemeth right unto a man (i.e., another gospel), but the end thereof are the ways of death (Proverbs 14:12).

This is not apparent in the account in Genesis but is known by the progressive revelation of God. We learn many things by progressive revelation as we go through the Bible. Everything we need to know about a subject is not found in one place. For example, in Genesis it is evident the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was a temptation to Eve. Later, in the book of James, James reveals that God cannot be tempted with evil, neither does He tempt man with evil. Finally, in the parable of the tares and the wheat found in Matthew, Mark and Luke, we learn that the Lord planted the wheat (the good seed), while the Devil planted the tares. By analogy, the wheat represents the truth of the gospel, and the tares represent the counterfeit gospel of the Devil. Thus, by progressive revelation, we know the Devil was responsible for the presence of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Eden, just as he is responsible (in this age) for the tares sown among the wheat.

The Devil used the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to promote his counterfeit gospel (his lie), which in this age corresponds with the tares. He seduced Eve with his lie by promising her life (and not death) if she would eat of the fruit of that tree:

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: for [Elohim] doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as [Elohim], knowing good and evil.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them

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both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. (Genesis 3:1-7. emphasis mine)

An analysis of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil gives us an insight into the religions of the world. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil supplied Adam and Eve with a knowledge of good and evil independent of God and in rebellion against God. This is now the source of man's morality, which is directly related to his religious ideas.

Therefore man is not a moral being because he was created in the image of God. He lost that image when he sinned against God. Man's sin gave him a new image, and this image is more like the one who caused his fall than like God. Man is egotistical and full of pride. He has a sin nature and is in rebellion against God. His heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). Thus man's ill-gained morality has produced a way which seems right to a man, but the results of this way of thinking always produces death (Proverbs 14:12). Consequently the many religions and moral systems of man promise life, but they always produce death, because their roots are in the lie and not in the truth. This is the reason our Lord said:

Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. (Matthew 12:33-34)

Our Lord also said:

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. (Matthew 7:15-20, emphasis mine)

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These statements by our Lord should have directed us to the two trees named in the account of the garden of Eden (the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life); but they have not done this because preachers and religious teachers have pointed at various kinds of base behavior (in both men and women), and they have misapplied these statements of our Lord to them. This does not make sense. Do not most religious systems espouse good moral behavior? How then can moral behavior differentiate between the true prophet and the false prophet?

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil manifested three things: it was good for food, it was pleasant to the eyes, and it was a tree to be desired to make one wise. The first two aspects of this tree produced the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes. It is from these aspects that man has his knowledge of what he terms evil. The third aspect of the tree produced the pride of life. It is from this aspect of the tree that man has what he calls good. Therefore it is this third aspect of the tree that produced the religions of the world. Thus it produced a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

Immediately after their sin and as a consequence of their sin, Adam and Eve felt guilt because of their nakedness and sewed fig leaves together in an attempt to cover their nakedness. Even so, their self-efforts at covering themselves did not cover their nakedness before God. Consequently they hid themselves from His presence rather than rejoicing in His presence as they had formerly done. Then, during the judgment of the serpent, God promised:

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel (Genesis 3:15).

This was a promise of redemption through a Kinsman Redeemer. Adam believed this promise and manifested it by naming his wife Eve, *the mother of all living*. Then God added to

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Adam's understanding of his declaration of faith by sacrificing an innocent animal (probably a lamb). This revealed redemption would be by a vicarious atonement, by the shedding of blood. It also revealed the truth of imputed righteousness. The skin of the sacrifice represented, in the typology of Scripture, the Righteousness of Jesus Christ. As the skin of the animal provided a suitable covering for their nakedness, so the Righteousness of Jesus Christ allows the believer to stand before God in Christ's perfect Righteous.

Let us now consider the nation of Israel. There is absolutely no question about the historicity of their faith. There is absolutely no question about the authority of their Scriptures. There is absolutely no question about the Biblical basis for the tabernacle in the wilderness, or of the temple which replaced it. The problem with Israel and Judaism rests in none of these things. The problem with Judaism rests in the fact that the Jews were ignorant of God's righteousness. Thus they tried to establish their own righteousness rather than submitting to the Righteousness of God (Romans 10:3), which is Jesus Christ.

James recognized the historicity of the faith of the Jews to whom he wrote. He recognized they had been the custodians of the truth for fifteen hundred years, but he also recognized that the faith that had once been delivered unto the saints had seen its share of corruption by the traditions of the elders. Therefore he wrote:

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the [demons] also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain

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man, that faith without works is dead? (James 2:14-20)

On the surface James seems to be espousing the very things which we have just seen are fruits from the evil tree. In fact, these verses have been used by every Christian sect (which believes in works to gain salvation or to maintain salvation) to prove their position. However we must remember the context and the people to whom James wrote if we are to view these statements properly. We must also remember that there cannot be a contradiction between one portion of the Word of God with another. So let us go back to where we were at the end of the last chapter.

Remember James had just established that the Jews to whom he wrote were respecters of persons. Since they were respecters of persons, this made them violators of the royal law: thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. It made no difference which point of the law they had failed in; to fail in one point was to be guilty of all. Therefore they could not be justified by the deeds of the law, for by the deeds of the law they were proven to be sinners.

These Jews were not trusting in Jesus Christ and the grace of God for their salvation; they were trusting in the works of their own hands, as established by the traditions of the elders. This then is the basis for comparing their faith which was in dead works, with James's faith which was in the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

Thus their faith was like telling a poor starving man, *Be warmed and be filled* and then not providing anything to satisfy his coldness and his hunger. Their faith was in a system of traditions which made the law of none effect, while it gave them a sense of righteousness. When they were confronted with the truth of the law, as preached by the Lord Jesus Christ in His sermon on the mount, they found themselves totally condemned. Notwithstanding they continued to give lip

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service to the precepts of the law, but they did not and they could not provide those things which were required by the law.

Contrasted with their faith was the faith of James. James's faith did not rest in his performance of the law. It could not. James's faith rested in the Person and the work of Jesus Christ in his behalf. James's faith was in the one sacrifice for sin forever.

James was a Jew. Therefore like his brethren, James had tried to establish his righteousness before God by law-works and the traditions of the elders. However there came the time when his vain faith was arrested. He repented of (changed his mind about) vainly trying to establish his relationship before God by the works of his own hands and put his trust in Jesus Christ as his Savior. When he did this, he came to realize that all of his failures before the law were forgiven. He also came to realize that the law he had vainly tried to keep had been fulfilled in his behalf by the One Who loved him and gave Himself for him.

From that time on, James could freely admit he was condemned by the law, but was justified freely by God's grace. Therefore James could rest in the perfect law of liberty, which is the grace of God. James was no longer a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work. This is the reason James challenged his brethren to compare their faith with his works.

Once again, James used his knowledge of Jewish practices as an avenue to present the gospel to them. According to the traditions of the elders (as revealed in James's statements about the hungry man), wanting to do the right thing was equivalent to doing the right thing. Therefore James pondered the concept, what good is it to tell a man to be warmed and fed if you do not warm and feed him. The Jewish practice, of wishing a thing to be so and then doing nothing, was

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merely another illustration of their violation of the royal law, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

In contrast to this we have James's practice of presenting the gospel to his brethren as a clear illustration of the works of his faith. Remember, when the Jews asked the Lord what they might do to work the works of God, our Lord told them that the work of God was to believe on the One Whom the Lord had sent (John 6:29). James was clearly working the works of God. His epistle proves that. James wrote to arrest his brethren from continuing in the vain traditions of the elders, and he endeavored to turn them to a genuine faith in Jesus Christ. This was the reason James was willing to compare their faith (which was clearly without works in the fulfilling of the ten commandments) with his works, which clearly manifested the love of Christ.

The Jews could have protested James's concern for their salvation with a strong affirmation of their belief in God. Consequently James wrote:

Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the [demons] also believe, and tremble (James 2:19, emphasis mine).

Whenever the gospel is presented to a religious person, who is trusting in his religious works as the basis of his acceptance with God, invariably he will protest, as the Jews protested, *I believe in God!* James made it clear that belief in God is not the basis for a right relationship with God. Even the demons believe in God, and they will be consigned to hell forever with no hope of redemption.

Belief in God in the abstract never helped anyone. Almost everyone who does not believe in the specific believes in the abstract, and that to no avail. A genuine faith in Jesus Christ is always in the specific. That is, it is faith as it is revealed in the Word of God. This is the reason

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the apostle John wrote:

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is in the world. (I John 4:1-3)

The Spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is the Spirit of God. To confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is to be in agreement with God about the Person and the work of Jesus Christ, because the Greek word for confess (*homologeō*) means to say the same thing as another. Thus trivial statements about Jesus Christ do not fulfill the meaning of confessing that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. The person that confesses in the Biblical sense of the word is in full agreement with God (God's Word) about the Person and work of His Son. Thus the demons know who Jesus is, but it is to no avail. Likewise a confession of an abstract belief in God is also of no avail. This is the reason James went on to say, *But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?* (James 2:20)

*O vain man* is the key phrase in this verse of Scripture. The Greek word for *vain* is *kenos*. *Kenos* means empty, having no thing, empty-handed, fallacious, false. Thus this word could not describe a person who is a genuine believer in Jesus Christ. The believer is a possessor of eternal life. He is a possessor of an inheritance in heaven which is incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away. It is a mockery of semantics to apply such a word to a genuine believer in Jesus Christ.

Thus a vain man is the possessor of a vain faith. A vain faith is a faith in the commandments and doctrines of men and not in the sure Word of God. The Jews to whom James wrote

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were possessors of a vain faith, because they were like their leaders, whom Jesus described:

... The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do: but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called Rabbi, Rabbi. (Matthew 23:2-7, emphasis mine)

From our Lord's description of the religious leaders in Israel, it is clear that their faith was a vain faith, with mere outward show and without any real substance. Thus there was no problem comparing their faith to James's faith. This was what James meant when he asked:

*But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?*

## Chapter X

### THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM AND RAHAB

James has established the difference between the vain faith of the Jews, with their say-so and do-nothing philosophy, and the faith of a genuine believer, with his works in the work of God. Any definition of faith, other than a Biblical definition, will produce a lot of subjective opinions. Thus the writer of the book of Hebrews defined faith as *the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen* (Hebrews 11:1).

This means Biblical faith is trusting in that which God has promised (believing He will perform His promises) without evidence beyond that which is declared in the Scriptures. Thus Paul wrote concerning Abraham's faith in the birth of Isaac:

(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations; according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. (Romans 4:17-21,

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emphasis mine)

A Biblical faith, then, is one which *cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* (Romans 10:17). A Biblical faith is also *being fully persuaded that what God has promised, God is able also to perform*. Consequently a Biblical faith is simply trusting that the Lord will do what He has promised to do, knowing He cannot do otherwise. James illustrated the difference between a Biblical faith and a vain faith (when he wrote about faith and works) at this point in the narrative:

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. (James 2:21-26)

From this portion of the Word of God we learn that a Biblical faith calls for a response, or an action, in keeping with the promise of God. In other words, if God tells us to do something in order to receive something, we have not exercised faith if we fail to do what God told us to do. We can say we believe it, but there is no tangible evidence we have believed it without the action, or work, required by God's promise.

James said it this way, *Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?* The word translated *perfect* is a Greek word, *teleioo*. It means to execute fully; discharge; to reach the end of; run through; finish; to consummate; place in a condition of finality; to be brought to the goal; to reach the end of one's course; to be fully developed. (The Analytical Greek

Lexicon, pg. 401; Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506; Ninth Printing, 1973)

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Thus a faith which is fully developed, or one which is brought to a condition of finality, is a faith which enters into the promises of God and actively puts to work the requirements surrounding His promises. For example, a person may say he believes a certain chair has the capacity to hold him up without collapsing. This same person may examine the chair for workmanship, design, construction techniques, material quality, and be thoroughly convinced the chair has the capacity to support his weight. However if he never commits his weight to the chair, he does not have an active faith in the capacity of the chair to support him.

He may affirm he has faith in the chair, but the commitment to prove his faith has never been made. His affirmation is akin to the Jews' say-so and do-nothing philosophy. Thus James contrasted a Biblical faith with the Jews' faith. A Biblical faith manifests itself with actions predicated upon the promises of God; whereas the Jews' faith, or philosophy, was illustrated by the man who told the hungry man, *Be warmed and be filled* and then provided nothing for him. In the Jewish way of thinking, the man fulfilled the royal law (thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself) when he said, *Be warmed and be filled*. But did he really love his neighbor as himself? Certainly not. In loving himself, he provided food and clothing for himself, but in *loving his neighbor*, he provided nothing but empty platitudes.

This brings us to the faith of Abraham and Rahab. These are the two people James chose to illustrate his point about faith and works. Anyone who understands anything about the lives of these two individuals should understand that James could not possibly be writing about moral works as a confirmation of faith. Such a position is simply untenable. Abraham certainly had character flaws when it comes to morality. On at least two occasions Abraham was willing to

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jeopardize his wife's chastity in order to save his own neck. As for Rahab, it goes without saying, you cannot boast the morality of a woman who makes her living by prostitution. At the time the spies came to her, there is nothing in Scripture to indicate she was not practicing her trade: she is described as *Rahab the harlot*. Thus Abraham and Rahab prove James was not expressing the need for moral works as evidence of a genuine faith. James was illustrating the point we have already made: faith that requires an action, produces the action required.

Thus James showed his Jewish brethren that the works which are wrought as a manifestation of a viable faith are works that are predicated upon the sure promises of God. God had promised Abraham that of his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. When it looked as though this promise could not be fulfilled (when Abraham and Sarah were too old to produce a son), God promised: *I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life, and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son*. Then Isaac was born according to God's promise. Later, when Isaac came to be about thirty-three years of age, God said:

... Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. (Genesis 22:2)

Therefore, based upon the promise of God (in Isaac all of the families of the earth shall be blessed), Abraham obeyed God. This was immediate. In the morning he saddled his ass with all of the things necessary for a burnt offering. He then took two servants, Isaac, and the ass, and traveled three days to the mount God showed him. At the base of the mount he transferred the burden from the ass to Isaac, and he told his servants: *Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you* (Genesis 22:5).

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When they reached the top of the mount, in keeping with God's command, Abraham bound Isaac to the wood to offer him as a burnt offering. When he raised his knife to slay him, God stopped him and provided a ram to be offered in his stead. Abraham's actions, to this point, proved he believed if he put Isaac to death according to God's command, God would raise him to life again. Abraham's faith was also expressed to his servants when he said, *I and the lad ... will come again to you*. Much later, in the New Testament, the Spirit of God testified to Abraham's faith through the writer to the Hebrews:

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure. (Hebrews 11:17-19, emphasis mine)

Many have marveled at Abraham's faith. Yet the truth is, everyone who has trusted the gospel -- that *Jesus Christ died for their sins according to the Scriptures* -- has exercised the same sort of faith. We have put our eternal security into God's hands (according to God's promise) the same as Isaac was put into God's hands (also according to His promise).

Rahab's faith was of the same sort. When the spies came to her she gladly received them, because she had observed God's dealings with Israel from the time they had left Egypt. Rahab had concluded the God of the Jews was the true and living God. This prompted her to receive the spies when they came to Jericho. It also prompted her to put her own life at risk to the local authorities when she hid the spies on the roof and told the authorities that the spies had been there, but they had left before the gate was closed. She told them she presumed they had gone towards the fords of Jordan. After the authorities left in search of the spies, the spies promised Rahab she would be preserved when Jericho was destroyed. All she had to do was hang the same scarlet cord

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(with which the spies would gain their freedom) out of the window when the armies of Israel would encircle the city to destroy it.

Since the two spies were the agents of God, they spoke with the authority of God. Thus when Rahab put the red cord out of the window as the armies of Israel approached the city of Jericho, this was evidence of her faith in the promise of God and the faith of those with her in the room. It mattered not that the promise was conveyed by the spies. They were to Rahab as those who preach the gospel in this age: they spoke by the authority of God. Remember our Lord said, *All [authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth, Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen* (Matthew 28:19-20, emphasis mine).

James used the positive actions of Abraham and Rahab to illustrate that a genuine faith is not passive but active. Then he said, *For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also* (James 2:26). This is just another way of saying what has already been said. Here the promise of God is likened to the body. The active faith of the individual in the promise of God is likened to the spirit, which gives the body life. One cannot work without the other. If no one, from Adam to the end of the age, ever believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, then the promise of eternal life to whomever believes would lie as a corpse. To put it another way, all of the promises God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were of none effect to those Jews (to whom James wrote) if they failed to enter into the reality of the promises by faith in Jesus Christ. Thus it would be as though the promises of God had never been made.

## Chapter XI

### BE NOT MANY MASTERS

The Scriptures reveal that the unsaved of this world do not have the capacity to understand spiritual truth. This is not due to a lack of intelligence or education, but it is due to the fact they are spiritually dead. The believer, on the other hand, has been regenerated by the preaching of the Word of God and the quickening power of the Spirit of God. This quickening produced a rebirth, a birth from above, so that the believer is spiritually alive.

The Spirit of God has indwelt the believer from the moment of that quickening to assure him of his salvation and to effect his spiritual growth, but this growth is not automatic. Since God alone knows the things of God, it is through the indwelling Spirit that spiritual truth is imparted to the believer through preaching, teaching, reading and studying the Word of God. This was never meant to be an independent process but a corporate function of the body of Christ. Therefore the believer is not to forsake the assembling of himself together with other believers, for God has given His church gifted men with special gifts of the Holy Spirit. These men have

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been given to the church:

For the [equipping] of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the [full] knowledge of the Son of God, unto a [mature] man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:12-16, emphasis mine)

The man of God, who is called and equipped of God, has the responsibility to instruct the people of God in spiritual truth. Therefore the position of a pastor-teacher should not be entered into lightly. It is not a position gained by popularity, but it is according to the elective purpose of God. This position, by its very nature, requires the man of God to *study to show himself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth* (II Timothy 2:15).

If the pastor-teacher fails to study to show himself approved unto God, then it is very likely that he will feel shame for improper teaching; or he may become ashamed of men who do study to show themselves approved unto God. This usually occurs because of the strong stand for the truth that the one who has studied, as he should, takes. Thus Paul wrote to Timothy: *At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me ...* (II Timothy 4:16). James was well aware of these kinds of pitfalls because of his personal experience following his salvation. Therefore James warned his Jewish brethren (scattered throughout the world) against their desires to teach spiritual truth: *My brethren, be not many [teachers], knowing that [teachers] shall receive the greater [judgment]* (James 3:1).

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Despite this warning, the Rabbis considered themselves experts in the Scriptures and the traditions of the elders. They would expound to great length on subjects they thought they knew, but being void of understanding of the Person and work of Christ and without the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God, they did not actually understand the texts they sought to expound.

The pastor-teacher within the body of Christ has a God-given position of authority. Therefore he needs to recognize, as a teacher, he bears a greater responsibility to the Word of God than those he teaches. No one should desire to be a pastor-teacher without a clear call from God and an awareness of the awesome responsibility that goes with this calling. The ministry is not a chosen profession, but a profession in which those who minister are chosen of God to do so. Even so, all teachers are subject to errors.

The born-again believer cannot apostatize, but he can misunderstand a portion of Scripture or follow the teaching of someone he esteems to be a great teacher. In this respect, I have found that when I have quoted a respected teacher (on the basis of his esteemed reputation) without carefully examining the evidence for myself, this is when I have been most prone to teach something I later wished I had not taught. I have come to the conclusion that the teacher should not teach anything that has not become a part of him by a present-tense conviction from the Word of God that it is so.

James made an error in encouraging Paul to go to the temple with four brethren who had made a vow; and Paul certainly made an error in judgment when he allowed himself to be persuaded contrary to what he knew to be true. This act was an absolute contradiction of the things he had taught the Galatians (if he did not, as we have suggested, have a direct command

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from God to do so). Even so, no one can seriously doubt Paul's qualifications or his gifts and calling; but that he acted contrary to what he had been teaching is a mystery which may not be solved this side of heaven. In fact many so-called Bible teachers attempt to justify James's instructions to Paul and Paul's willingness to follow them. They use these events in an effort to prove believers have a responsibility to perform the deeds of the law. This is a position that cannot be supported by the Scriptures, rightly divided.

For in many things we [all make mistakes]. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? Either a vine, figs? So can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh. (James 3:2-12)

With these words James sought to silence the Jews who persisted in teaching that a man could be justified by the deeds of the law. At the same time James sought to lay hold upon the hearts of the Jews who may have had some realization they were guilty before the law. Therefore James included himself, when he said, *We all make mistakes*. Then James illustrated the truth of his statement with a description of the tongue.

One of the most common areas in which man errs is in the use of his tongue in speech.

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If man could control his tongue, truly, he would be a mature man having everything else under control. James reminded the Jews, even though the tongue is one of the smallest members of the body, it cannot be controlled. Therefore the Jews, in their covenant relationship with God based upon law, could not possibly maintain such a relationship because of their tongues. Their tongues, like rudders on a ship or bits in the mouths of horses, sealed their condemnation. With their tongues they blessed God and cursed man. In fact the Jews cursed men like James and the apostle Paul. They condemned all who stood for the grace of God. The Jews called it blasphemy to even consider the possibility that a Gentile could be saved. Thus when Paul spoke to the Jews in Jerusalem, they listened attentively until Paul mentioned the Gentiles:

And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; and saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: and when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live. And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air, the chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him. (Acts 22:17-24, emphasis mine)

James sought to show the Jews there was something wrong with their attitudes and hopes. A fountain cannot bring forth sweet water and brackish water at the same time. The Jews claimed they were the children of God. Nevertheless most of them denied the truth of the Word of God. Their claims to the things of God were strictly at a natural level. They apparently did not comprehend that the flesh has no inheritance in the things of God. This truth is clarified by the apostle John:

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He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:11-13)

A spiritual inheritance is obtained by a spiritual birth. Therefore Jesus told the Jewish Rabbi, Nicodemus, he could not enter the kingdom of God on the basis of his natural birth. Jesus said, *Ye must be born again*. This is not a denial of the earthly promises God has made to the nation of Israel. It is, rather, a clarification of the truth that a spiritual inheritance comes only by a spiritual birth.

All of the Jews' natural pride and bitterness against the Gentiles manifested itself in an unruly tongue, which spoke against the promises of God. Rather than embracing the grace of God for themselves and rejoicing that God had also extended His grace to the Gentiles, the Jews were full of petty jealousy. On the one hand they claimed to be the children of God, and on the other hand they sought to destroy the true children of God. Thus the Jews were an enigma. They were like a fountain that sought to bring forth sweet and bitter water at the same time. They were like a fig tree that tried to bear olive berries.

The truth conveyed in these physical impossibilities was given to convey the spiritual impossibility of the Jews' relationship with God. They could not be the children of God and heirs of the promises and stand in opposition to the Word of God. They needed to subject themselves to the wisdom (salvation) of God and be rid of the bitter envy which they manifested against the true children of God.

## Chapter XII

### LIE NOT AGAINST THE TRUTH

In our studies thus far James has established the fact that the wisdom of God (which is salvation) was available to the Jews if they would ask for it in faith, without wavering. He has established the vanity of the Jews' faith, with its say-so and do-nothing philosophy. He has shown the folly of the Jews' relationship to the law. They believed that their observances of the traditions of the elders satisfied the righteous demands of the law. So James used the common practice of the Jews, to have respect to persons, to strip away their facade of righteousness when he wrote:

If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: but if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. (James 2:8-10, emphasis mine)

Therefore James challenged the Jews to compare their faith, with its condemnation before the law (because they certainly did not perform the works of the law), with his faith with its works. He illustrated what a faith with works is. He used the faith of Rahab and Abraham (who acted upon the promises of God by faith) to show the Jews that a genuine faith produces actions

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in accordance with the promises of God. The Jews' faith did not produce this kind of works. Thus the works produced by faith are not sham moral platitudes (as was the faith of the Jews), but they are works produced by the belief that what God has promised, He is able also to perform (Romans 4:21). This is best illustrated in the matter of salvation. The believer has his trust in the fact that Christ died for his sins, according to the Scriptures, was buried and arose again the third day, according to the Scriptures. The believer is at rest in the completed work of Christ, knowing that he is eternally secure in Christ. So everything that he does by faith is predicated upon his faith in the Person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember, our Lord said: *This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent* (John 6:29). In contrast to this, James has shown his Jewish brethren that their practice of accusing others and excusing themselves (Romans 2:15) was enigmatical. He compared this practice of blessing God and cursing man to the inability of a fountain to bring forth both sweet and salt water:

Who is a wise [saved] man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good [manner of life] his works with meekness of wisdom [salvation]. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. (James 3:13-14, emphasis mine)

There is a genuine humility which goes with a right relationship with the Lord. It is not the false humility of the world, but a humility which is born out of seeing things as they really are. All genuine believers in Jesus Christ know they are sinners. They know the only way they can be justified before a holy and righteous God is by faith in Jesus Christ. They know there is absolutely nothing of which they can boast in their relationship with God. They know they have been saved by the grace of God. Therefore they know there is no merit in their relationship with God. This is the *meekness of wisdom* of which James wrote.

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Consequently the manner of life of the redeemed is a manifestation of wisdom (i.e., salvation) and humility (i.e., a true view that one's relationship with the Lord is entirely of grace). Such a person should not be full of vain glory, bitterness and envy. They certainly should not lie against the truth of God's Word, because it is the truth that has set them free. Thus the bitterness and envy that was often manifested by the Jews against the Gentiles was a lie against the truth, for it violated the Jews' covenant responsibility: *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*. Thus, during the public ministry of our Lord:

... a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted [Jesus], saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? How readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? (Luke 10:25-29, emphasis mine)

Questions like these of our Lord have confused many people about the law. Confusion comes because they think the Lord has implied that eternal life can be obtained by the observance of the law. They are ignorant of or they have forgotten that the purpose of the law was to act as a schoolmaster to bring the Jews unto Christ, that they might be justified by faith and not by the deeds of the law; because by the deeds of the law, no flesh is justified in God's sight (Galatians 3:11-12). Therefore they have missed the point, or they have forgotten, that the Lord spoke these words to a Jewish lawyer. Thus, as a Jew, the lawyer had a responsibility to the covenant of the law; so the Lord dealt with him as a Jew under the covenant of the law.

Apparently the lawyer did not know that the law's ministry was a ministry of death (II Corinthians 3:7). Apparently he did not understand that the schoolmaster role of the law was to

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condemn him (Galatians 3:10), so that it could bring him by faith to his need of salvation in Jesus Christ. Thus if he was to come to faith, he would have to understand that even though he was condemned by the law, Christ fulfilled the law in his behalf, and He died in his stead to ransom him from the penalty of sin. This understanding could only come to him by the preaching of the Word of God and the quickening power of the Spirit of God.

An examination of the lawyer's answer shows us he knew he had a covenant responsibility to love the Lord with all of his heart, soul, strength, and mind and to love his neighbor as himself; but he had a definite bias as to who his neighbor might be. Thus he asked, *Who is my neighbor?*

... Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise. (Luke 10:30-37, emphasis mine)

In this parable Jesus answered the Jewish attitudes toward the royal law: *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*. He did so by speaking a parable to a lawyer in which there was a threefold philosophy of life. The philosophy of the thieves was: What is yours is ours, we will take it. The philosophy of the Priest and the Levite was: What is mine is mine, I will keep it. And the philosophy of the good Samaritan was: What is mine is yours, we will share it.

Thus, according to our Lord's parable, a man was wounded by thieves and left half dead.

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The first to come his way, who could love him and care for his needs, was a priest. He represents the high leadership in organized religion. Certainly, if anyone could love his neighbor as himself, you would expect a priest to be able to do it, but he did not. Rather he passed to the other side of the way where the man was lying. The priest ignored the man. It was beneath his dignity as a priest to care for such trivial matters. No one would expect a man in his position to perform such a menial task.

The second person to come the way of the injured man was a Levite. He was also a minister in organized religion, but of a lesser position. He, unlike the priest, at least took the time to look at the man, but then he also went his way, passing to the other side. Thus, as represented by the priest and the Levite, there was no help for the man in organized religion. Our Lord's parable revealed that Judaism had lived up to the way it was practiced. It claimed to love God with all of its heart and soul and its neighbor as itself; but it did nothing to aid the injured man (who represents the lost of this world), other than manifesting an indifferent curiosity towards him.

The third person to come the injured man's way was a Samaritan. The Jews despised the Samaritans from the time that the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity. Our Lord was also *despised and rejected of* the nation of Israel. Therefore the good Samaritan, by a proper interpretation of the parable, represents the Lord Jesus Christ. He, only, has fulfilled the royal law: *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*. He, like the Samaritan in the parable, could and would meet the needs of the whole world, represented in the injured man. The philosophy of the Samaritan was: what is mine is yours, we will share it. This is the truth of imputed righteousness,

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which is the believer's in Jesus Christ. While this was a truth that should have been known to the lawyer, it was not known to him nor to the majority of the nation of Israel.

The Jews saw themselves superior and wiser in the things of God than the Gentiles. God had made them the custodians of the Word of God for fifteen hundred years. Thus Paul wrote to the Romans that there was an advantage in being a Jew, because ... *unto them were committed the oracles of God*. Despite being the custodians of the truth, the Jews as a whole were ignorant of the truth of the Word of God, because they had substituted the commandments and doctrines of men for the truth. Thus their sense of superiority was born of ignorance and arrogance, and these precipitated their *lies against the truth*.

Judaism was based upon the concept of establishing one's own righteousness before God, by the works of one's own hands, through a set of interpretations and traditions provided by the elders. Since the Jews were incapable of keeping the precepts of the law as given to Moses, they, as well as all other self-righteous systems, accused others and excused themselves to gain a sense of being holy.

Virtually every system based upon self-righteousness has an ecclesiastical strata. Those who are at the lower echelons are always envious of those in the higher strata. Consequently there is envy and strife and every evil work in an attempt to climb the ecclesiastical ladder. Thus James described the Jewish ecclesiastical system by stating: *This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work* (James 3:15-16).

From this statement we understand that the Jews referred to Judaism as the wisdom of God.

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Thus their wisdom was synonymous with their faith. This is another plausible reason why James used wisdom (in the first chapter of his epistle) to represent salvation and the faith, but the Jews' wisdom did not have its source in God. Their wisdom in spiritual matters had its source in the world, the flesh and the Devil. Thus their wisdom was earthly, natural and demonic. Therefore it produced strife and confusion. Paul told the Corinthians, *God is not the author of confusion*. Paul also told the Corinthians that whatever spiritual gift or gifts we have (as Christians) they are to be exercised in love. Thus the love of Christ, not law, is the motivating factor for Christian service. It was the love of Christ which constrained Paul to preach. Any motivation, other than the love of Christ, counts for nothing. Thus Paul wrote:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity [Greek: *agape*, love: more specifically the love of Christ as seen in I John 4:10], I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not [the love of Christ], I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not [the love of Christ], it profiteth me nothing. [The love of Christ] suffereth long, and is kind; [the love of Christ] envieth not; [the love of Christ] vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. [The love of Christ] never faileth. (I Corinthians 13:1-8a, emphasis mine)

Just as James compared the faith of the Jews with his faith in the second chapter of his epistle, at this point James compared the wisdom of God with the wisdom of the Jews. Their wisdom was born in strife. It was full of envy. There was no peace in it. However, in the love of Christ, which is a manifestation of the wisdom that comes from above, we find that the love of Christ is not easily provoked. It does not think in the terms of the evil one. The love of Christ does not rejoice in iniquity, which is false worship, it rejoices in the truth of the saving grace of

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Jesus Christ.

Therefore the Jews to whom James wrote were not Christians. They were Jews of the *diaspora*, who were steeped in a religious system which was full of envy, strife, and confusion. They were steeped in a system that had its roots in the evil works of the evil one (who deceived Eve in the garden of Eden). Thus the Jews had come to think according to a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death (Proverbs 14:12).

## Chapter XIII

### THE WISDOM THAT IS FROM ABOVE

We have learned that James used *wisdom* to denote the salvation of the soul. The Scriptures declare that our Lord Jesus Christ is *the author and finisher of our faith* (Hebrews 12:2). This makes Him the Author of *the wisdom that is from above* (James 3:17). In contrast with God's wisdom, the serpent introduced mankind to the wisdom of this world. This is man's knowledge of good and evil of which our Lord warned: *Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof [dying, thou shalt die]* (Genesis 2:16-17, emphasis mine).

This illicitly obtained knowledge of *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life* (I John 2:16) has provided the world with its source of good and evil, its knowledge of right and wrong, and its morality. This knowledge (obtained by disobedience to God) placed man in a new state, and this state is not to be confused with man's original state (when he was created in the image of God). Thus the knowledge of evil obtained from this tree is the source of all of the

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sins, from the least to the greatest, committed by man; while the knowledge of good, also obtained from this tree, is the source of the religions and social mores of this world. These are as varied as the cultures of this world are varied, but they are without absolutes. Even so, the world still views them as good despite the fact that the Psalmist wrote, *For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the LORD made the heavens* (Psalm 96:5).

Man's knowledge of good may at times even allow him to give lip service to some aspects of the truth. It may even produce rather high standards of conduct; but these standards cannot, with any degree of perfection, come close to satisfying the Holiness of God nor meet the perfect Righteousness of Jesus Christ. Solomon described that which was obtained from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil when he wrote: *There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death* (Proverbs 14:12, emphasis mine). In contrast, our text states:

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace. (James 3:17-18)

James began his epistle by posing the availability of the wisdom of God to those, among *the twelve tribes scattered abroad*, who could by the *trial of their faith* discover whether their faith was genuine, or whether it was steeped in *the commandments and doctrines of men*. James enjoined them, if they discovered they lacked the wisdom of God (salvation), to *ask in faith, nothing wavering*, and God would provide salvation without upbraiding those who sought it.

James enlarged upon the wisdom of God in our text. This provided his audience with the obvious difference between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world, which, for the most

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part, was portrayed to the Jews through the traditions of the elders, *after the commandments and doctrines of men*.

First, the wisdom of God is pure. It is not full of the envy, strife and sedition that was so evident among the Jews of the land and the Jews of the *diaspora*. God's wisdom (salvation) rests in the completed work of Jesus Christ. It recognizes all real purity is available only in Him, by imputation, on the judicial basis of His one sacrifice for sin forever.

Second, God's wisdom is peaceable. It provides each believer peace with God. This peace is based upon the judicial reckoning of God through *the blood of Jesus Christ his Son* [which] *cleanseth us from all sin* (I John 1:7). All who have accepted God's grace are at peace with God. Conversely all who have not availed themselves of the salvation that is in Christ are the enemies of God (Romans 5:10). Being at peace with God means the believer in Jesus Christ is at rest. Thus all human effort for righteousness is past:

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour [Greek: *spendo*, be eager] therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. (Hebrews 4:9-11, emphasis mine)

In addition to being at peace with God, the one who possesses this wisdom can obtain, through spiritual growth *in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (II Peter 3:18), *the peace of God, which passeth all understanding* (Philippians 4:7). With this peace the believer is comforted in all of his afflictions and trials (II Corinthians 4:8-18).

Third, the one who possesses the wisdom of God (salvation) realizes it is gentle and easy to be entreated. The believer has direct access into the presence of God on the basis of the blood of Christ. He can come boldly unto the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16). His approach is never

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on the basis of his own righteousness. It is always on the basis of the blood and in the name of Jesus Christ. Thus the believer can never be refused access, because Christ stood in his stead in life, fulfilling every jot and tittle of the law and all righteousness, and He stood in his stead in death, providing a just payment for his sins. This means that Christ has borne the believer's judgment and clothed him in His own perfect Righteousness so that he is, because of God's infinite grace, *accepted in the beloved* (Ephesians 1:6).

The wisdom of God is *gentle* (*epieikes*, in the Greek). It means: fitting, meet, suitable. Thus it carries the idea of a thing being reasonable, plausible, fair and equitable. Salvation is all of these. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me* (John 14:6). This statement is reasonable, plausible, fair and equitable, because our Lord Jesus Christ is God, Who, through His incarnation, fulfilled every jot and tittle of the law; died a perfect sacrifice for sin; and arose from the dead to provide the victory over sin, death and the grave. Indeed, salvation is gentle and easily entreated.

Fourth, the wisdom of God is full of mercy. This is true because all of the recipients of it were guilty before God. Nevertheless mercy could not be dispensed without regard for God's Person. Thus mercy, like its twin sister grace, is bestowed by God on the basis of the perfect life and the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ in behalf of sinners:

Wisdom [salvation] strengtheneth the wise [saved] man more than ten mighty men which are in the city. For there is not a just man upon the earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. (Ecclesiastes 7:19-20, emphasis mine)

When Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he disqualified himself and his race from the presence of God. The penalty for his sin was death, both spiritual and physical.

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Therefore it is not possible (through natural generation, due to kinship with Adam) for any man to bear the judgment of the human race, other than Jesus Christ.

According to the law of redemption, the Redeemer had to be a near Kinsman. This required the Christ to come into this world, *in the fulness of the time*, by means of the virgin birth. This enabled Him to be both God and Man, but a man without the sin nature of all who are related to Adam by blood (through natural generation). As the God-Man He could stand in man's stead in life and in death. He was a suitable Redeemer, a near Kinsman:

But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest [man] a little lower than the angels; thou crownest [man] with glory and honour, and didst set [man] over the works of thy hands [see Genesis 1:26]: thou hast put all things in subjection under [man's] feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under [man]. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the [Author] of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the [assembly] will I sing praise unto thee. And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. 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. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted. (Hebrews 2:6-18, emphasis mine)

The incarnation, perfect life (in fulfillment of every jot and tittle of the law and of all righteousness), crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ provided the basis upon which

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God is able to bestow his mercy upon fallen man. Therefore God's salvation is full of mercy and good fruits. Those who are the recipients of God's mercy through faith are the good fruits James spoke of.

Fifth, God's salvation is without partiality. The Greek word James used, which was translated *without partiality*, is *adiakritos*. It is the negative form of *diakrino*, which carries the idea of being discriminating, or separating combatants, thus it came to mean: *to make a distinction of persons*. It also has a secondary meaning: to make a decision. The positive form of the word is *decisive*, while the negative form of the word (as in our text) is *indecisive*.

Our text does not show us positively whether salvation is without partiality or whether it is without indecision, but both are true. The fact is, God has the sovereign right to save whom He will, and this is clearly expressed by the apostle Paul in the book of Romans:

I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son. And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.

As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that

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sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? (Romans 9:1-24, emphasis mine)

Salvation is also without indecision. James declared that the wavering, or indecisive man, would receive nothing of the Lord, and salvation is received as a gift of God. Thus both Jews and Gentiles are saved by grace through faith:

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of [the] promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye [Gentiles] who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us [Jews and Gentiles]; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain [Jew and Gentile] one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both [Jew and Gentile] unto God in one body [the called out assembly of God from all ages] by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you [Gentiles] which were afar off, and to them [Jews] that were nigh. For through him we both [Jews and Gentiles] have access by one Spirit unto the Father. (Ephesians 2:11-18)

Paul made it clear, in God's called-out assembly we have both Jews and Gentiles, but no distinction is drawn between the Jews and the Gentiles. They are one in Christ. When it comes to the question of whether there could be any partiality in salvation, there is none. Salvation is by grace and grace is unmerited favor, so the concept that God elected men to salvation on the

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basis of His omniscient view of their future lives is false.

There was no indecision on the part of God in providing for mankind's salvation. God cannot be indecisive. Indecision is a human trait which is contrary to the nature of God. In the Bible every promise God has made is yea and amen. His promises are as certain as having already been fulfilled, for in the omniscience of God they have already been fulfilled.

*Adiakritos*, which can be translated *indecision*, is probably a reference (as previously noted) to the double-minded man, who receives nothing from the Lord. In our lives there may have been much indecision, but when it came to salvation, God changed us completely unto Himself when He quickened us by His Word and by His Spirit:

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new [creation]: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled [Greek: *katallaso*, changed completely] us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. (II Corinthians 5:17-19)

Not only is the believer changed completely to God, he is complete in Christ, lacking nothing.

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments [regimen] of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power. (Colossians 2:8-10, emphasis mine)

Finally salvation is without hypocrisy. This was of particular importance in James's argument to the Jews, because Judaism (as practiced by the *traditions of the elders*) was based entirely upon hypocrisy. Our Lord's denunciation of the Jews (in the twenty-third chapter of Matthew) is a revelation of the complete sham of Judaism as it was practiced in that day.

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Hypocrisy is a common word in the English language. Nevertheless few people know the true meaning of the word as it comes to us from the Greek language, where it is used in its various forms for *acting* and *actors*. Consequently people are called hypocrites who are not hypocritical at all. In fact those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and take their stand firmly in the grace of God, are often called hypocrites. These believers have trusted that the *one sacrifice for sin forever* has clothed them in the perfect Righteousness of Jesus Christ. They do not pretend to be something they are not. They know God has known all about them from all eternity, because David has revealed that nothing is hidden to God's omniscient view (Psalm 139). Therefore there is no room for pretense in the believer's relationship with the Lord. He has been separated completely unto God by God's judicial decree; and he is, therefore, deemed holy, even though he retains his sin nature until the day of his glorification (Compare 1 John 1:8 with I John 3:1-2).

All of the religious systems of the world, as we noted earlier, have a common denominator. They all predicate the attainment of their religious goals on human behavior. However Biblical Christianity declares all men to be sinners. Therefore, in terms of their relationship with God, nothing can be obtained by human behavior. In order to be accepted by God, man must come on the basis of God's grace. Grace is the unmerited love and favor of God in man's behalf. It was revealed in the sacrifice of God's Son as a vicarious atonement (covering) for the sins of the whole world. Thus God is judicially satisfied with the life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This has enabled God to bestow His grace on whoever believes.

Despite this, man will not leave the leaven of hypocrisy alone. He corrupts the grace of God by imposing all kinds of restrictions of *touch not, taste not, and handle not* into the gospel

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of the grace of God. In his desire to produce *holy living*, man actually produces another gospel; so that Paul wrote:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For [am I now persuaded by man, or by God]? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. (Galatians 1:6-10)

The perversion of the gospel, which had come to the churches of Galatia, was the adding of the necessity of circumcision and the keeping of the law of Moses to the simple message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. This was a complete misunderstanding of the *schoolmaster* role of the law which was designed to condemn the Jews that they might come to Christ to be justified by faith, because they could not be justified by the deeds of the law.

If a man is proven to be a sinner by his failure before the law and is thus driven to faith in Christ for justification; he will nevertheless continue to have his Adamic nature until he is delivered from it by his resurrection and glorification. But if by that Adamic nature, which is called the flesh, he continues to sin, then all that can result from an attempted performance of the law is self-condemnation.

An honest appraisal of oneself before the law produces condemnation, whereas a dishonest appraisal produces hypocrisy. The Bible states that in salvation there is neither the condemnation of the believer, nor is there hypocrisy. Therefore all of the legalistic *do's and don'ts*, which have been added to salvation, are clearly additions to and not a part of salvation. The believer is declared to be dead with Christ by the judicial reckoning of God. Thus the believer is judicially

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dead to the law, and where there is no law, there is no transgression (Romans 4:15). Consequently the law no longer has dominion over the believer, because *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh* [the law, see Galatians 3:2-3], *but after the Spirit* (Romans 8:1).

Finally, with respect to the wisdom that is from above, James wrote, *And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace*. By this James declared there is no internal war for the believer who understands his right relationship with God. This believer is at rest. He knows God is just and the justifier of those who do no more than to believe. Thus he is at peace with God.

This, after all, is one of the precepts our Lord proclaimed to the Jews in His sermon on the mount. The Jews were either guilt ridden because of their failure before the law, or they were puffed up in their own self-righteousness and hypocrisy because of their sham performance of the law (by the *traditions of the elders*). Therefore our Lord told them, *Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God*. This is not the so-called peacemakers of this world, who try to effect world peace, but those who bring a man into a relationship of peace with God through the gospel:

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God [did,] sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (Romans 8:2-4, emphasis mine)

Thus James has revealed to the *twelve tribes scattered abroad* what true salvation in Jesus Christ is. He has removed all grounds for boasting. He has laid them bare by his description of

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the wisdom that comes from above. He reduced the Jews to the place where most of them would have to admit they did not have the *wisdom of God*. They also would have to admit that they had lied against the truth. Nevertheless if they would have recognized their relationship before God, and if they would have changed their minds, salvation was available to them by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9).

## Chapter XIV

### YE ADULTERERS AND ADULTERESSES

It has become customary to refer to the various documents of the Old and New Testaments as books, such as the book of Genesis, the book of Isaiah, the book of Jeremiah, the book of Romans, the book of James, etc. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this, but some of the books of the New Testament are epistles. Epistles are letters. Thus, as with a letter from a dear one, it would behoove us to read them in their entirety at one sitting.

In the original Greek and Hebrew Scriptures there were no chapter and verse divisions in any of the documents. These were added to provide a convenient referencing system, but their placement was not done, in many instances, with regard for the context. Some of these chapter divisions have been awkwardly placed, and many verse divisions come in the middle of sentences. With our tendency to read a chapter or two, or a few verses at a time, important connections in the context can be interrupted by these necessary references.

We should be aware, then, of the structure of the epistle of James. Each part of each

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succeeding chapter(s) is an integral part of the preceding chapter(s). The argument in chapter three, where James contrasted the wisdom of the Jews with the wisdom that is from above, is a continuation of the theme of chapter one, where James offered his readers the wisdom of God. Likewise chapter two establishes the need for the wisdom which was offered in chapter one by revealing the emptiness of the Jews' vain faith.

Here, in chapter four, James began to close his argument. Thus far, he had established the guilt of the Jews and the vanity of their faith, but he did not hold this against them. James asked:

From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. (James 4:1-10)

The statement *fightings among you* in these verses is better rendered *fightings in you*. It is a reference to the Jews' inner turmoil and lack of confidence before the law. Basically, James asked, *Why do you have so many fears and doubts in your mind? Why do you worry about your relationship with God?* The answer to this was obvious. The Jews had doubts because of their empty pretense at establishing their own righteousness by failed attempts of law-keeping. Anyone who pretends to be something he is not must be aware of his pretense.

Nevertheless it is possible for people to tell the same lies long enough, that they begin to

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believe them themselves. Do you remember the indictment our Lord brought against the Jews in the twenty-third chapter of Matthew's gospel? He established the guilt of the Jewish leaders when He said:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain [out] a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. (Matthew 23:23-28, emphasis mine)

This indictment is every bit as applicable to the Jews to whom James wrote as it was to the scribes and Pharisees to whom Christ gave it. Perhaps there was one difference. The scribes and Pharisees were so steeped in error, most of them would never accept the wisdom from above. However James must have felt there was some hope for the Jews to whom he wrote. Therefore he magnified their failures and their corrupt motives. Some of them had given lip service to faith in Christ, but their double-mindedness had prevented them from receiving the wisdom that is from above. So James wrote, *Ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss.*

When James told them they were *adulterers and adulteresses*, this was not a reference to a certain sin of the flesh, but to the well-established fact of Israel's idolatry. This spiritual condition was the reason the Jews to whom James wrote were scattered among the Gentile nations of the world. God had judged the idolatry of their forefathers. He had scattered the northern ten

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tribes by the Assyrian captivity and the southern two tribes by the Babylonian captivity.

The Jews to whom James wrote had not changed much during their exile into the Gentile nations of the world. Their fruits were from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Their thoughts were centered in the concept of merit and reward -- *a way which seemeth right unto a man*. In a word, they were still worshipping according to the world's system. Thus both the Jews of the land and the Jews of the *diaspora* were described by Paul, when he wrote:

... I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. (Romans 10:2-3)

Israel's relationship with the Lord is typified in Scripture by Cain. Cain killed his brother in a jealous and self-righteous rage after rejecting the truth -- *without the shedding of blood there is no remission*. He was sent wandering outside of the paradise of God. Israel had likewise been dispersed among the Gentile nations of the world; and even though some Jews had returned to the land after the Babylonian captivity, their house was once again desolate. They were to be scattered by the Romans in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

The world's system is steeped in *the ways of death*. Therefore anyone who is the friend of the world is the enemy of God. In James's age, as well as in this age, man continued to choose the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil instead of the fruit of the tree of life. Man's choice of the fruit of the tree of good and evil in lieu of the tree of life (faith in Christ), makes man a friend of the world and the enemy of God. It makes such a person a spiritual adulterer or adulteress.

There was no question in the minds of knowledgeable Jews as to the meaning of James's

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accusation: *Ye adulterers and adulteresses*. In the Old Testament Scriptures, this was the accusation the nation of Israel received every time they departed from the truth of the Word of God to follow after the various idolatrous systems in the land of Canaan. The commandments of God forbade idolatry; nevertheless Israel had worshipped Moloch, Baal, Ashtaroth and all of the other gods of the land. She had totally embraced the world's system.

Therefore James wrote to the Jews, whose parents had been dispersed because of this idolatry, ... *know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?* The truth that had been given to the nation of Israel (by God through the prophets) had been so corrupted by Jewish tradition that it bore no semblance to the truth God had given them. This has become the condition of many churches under the canopy of Christianity. Paul prophesied of this condition in Romans chapter eleven and in Second Thessalonians chapter two. In Mark chapter seven, our Lord had a confrontation with the scribes and Pharisees, who asked:

... Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. (Mark 7:5-9, emphasis mine)

It mattered not that Judaism had been born in the truth. It mattered not that all of its prophets were men of God. Judaism had degenerated into a system which was void of the truth, and this had been prophesied by many of the Old Testament prophets, so that the prophet Hosea was commanded to marry a whore, that God might show the love He had for Israel. It was Israel's ignorance of the truth of the Scriptures that had gotten her in trouble. Thus Hosea wrote:

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My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children. (Hosea 4:6)

And the prophet Amos reiterated the same truth:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it. (Amos 8:11-12)

Israel's self-righteousness and the blindness and the hardness of her heart had prevented the Jews from embracing the message which James and the other apostles preached. Nevertheless the Jews' blind eyes, deaf ears and hard hearts could be opened by the Spirit of God and the Word of God through the preaching of the gospel. This is true because God has chosen by *the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe*. Consequently, like the prophets of old, James extended an invitation to them, *Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded*. James's invitation was virtually the same as the invitation of the Old Testament prophets, *Return unto me and I will return unto you*.

God continues to be jealous over Israel's spiritual adultery and her rejection of Him. Even so, God's grace is still extended to His people. If they are to come unto Him, they must come by faith in Jesus Christ, Whom they rejected and crucified. God cannot deny Himself.

## Chapter XV

### PURIFY YOUR HEARTS, YE DOUBLE MINDED

James has prosecuted his case against the Jews in the first three chapters of his epistle very well. In this fourth chapter, he has brought an indictment against them: they were spiritual adulterers and adulteresses. This evoked the question:

Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that [dwelt] in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. (James 4:5-10, emphasis mine)

The Jews' pride needed to be broken. They needed to know they worshipped falsely. They needed to know they were spiritual adulterers and adulteresses. They needed to remember God's indictment against their fathers, revealed in His instructions to Hosea:

Then said the LORD unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine. So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley: and I said unto her, Thou shalt

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abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee.

For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days. (Hosea 3:1-5)

The Old Testament is replete with Israel's idolatry and God's desire for them to return unto Him. In fact, before they ever entered the land, Moses prophesied:

But Jeshurun [Israel] waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation. They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto [demons], not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not. Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee.

And when the LORD saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters. And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith. They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people [Gentiles]; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. (Deuteronomy 32:15-21, emphasis mine)

The Spirit of God had often been provoked to jealousy because of Israel's false worship. It was only a little over three months after the Jews had come out of Egypt: with the deliverance of the passover; with the deliverance at the Red Sea; with the slaying of the army of the Egyptians in the Red Sea; with the sweetening of the bitter waters at Marah; with the daily provision of manna; with God's abiding presence in the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud; with God's presence on Sinai; with God's voice speaking the precepts of the law to Israel; with Israel's response, *All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do* -- when Israel demanded of Aaron, *Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land*

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*of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him* (Exodus 32:1).

If Israel had paused to reflect upon all of her previous failures (before she entered into the covenant of the law), she might have realized she could not possibly keep the law, but she did not. She had rebelled against Moses and Aaron in Egypt. When she left Egypt, except for a brief time on the far shore of the Red Sea, she complained every step of the way from Egypt to Sinai; but this did not stop her from declaring her desire to enter the covenant of the law: to be blessed on the basis of the performance of the law, never considering she would be cursed for her failures.

The truth is: Israel did not know how weak she was. This can be seen in the fact that before Moses could return from the mount (after forty days and forty nights), Israel had violated every precept of the law in the debauchery associated with the worship of the golden calf. Therefore *in the determinate counsel, and foreknowledge of God*, the law was *added because of transgressions, till the seed should come*. The purpose of the law, then, was to direct Israel back to God's grace, revealed in the sacrificial system and fulfilled in Jesus Christ *in the fulness of the time*. It did this by being a ministry of condemnation and death -- to magnify the transgressions of Israel that they might trust in the Lord for salvation. Therefore:

... he giveth more grace. Wherefore, he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. (James 4:6)

The *humble* in this text are those who have been humbled by the law and recognized themselves sinners before God. They have no air of smug self-righteousness, based upon law-works, but the recognition: *There is not a just man upon the earth, that doeth good and sinneth not*. The law has performed its *schoolmaster* role for them: to bring them unto Christ, Who, incidentally, was portrayed in the sacrificial system.

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Thus, in addition to receiving the tablets containing the law on mount Sinai, Moses received the pattern of the tabernacle and all of the terms of the sacrificial system. The tabernacle in the wilderness was a manifestation of the grace of God. It was erected (according to God's specific instructions) to provide a place where God could dwell with the nation of Israel. (Compare Exodus 25:8 with Matthew 1:23)

The ministry of the tabernacle and its priests was to make provision for Israel's failures under the law. Therefore the tabernacle in the wilderness (and later, the temple in Jerusalem) represents, through the shadows and types of the Scriptures, the Person and the work of Emmanuel (God with us), the Lord Jesus Christ. Any failure which was wrought under the terms of the law was dealt with by the appropriate sacrifice upon the altar at the door of the tabernacle. This was the basis for James's statement, *But he giveth more grace*, and it is the reason Paul wrote: *Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith* (Galatians 3:24).

As we have emphasized before, Israel's tragedy was that she held to the traditions of the elders rather than to the Word of God. When the law condemned Israel, she merely interpreted it so that it did not condemn her. This, as we have already seen, is the reason our Lord told the Jews, *Ye make the commandments of God of none effect by your traditions*. Therefore, to counter the Jews' traditions, James wrote, *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble, submit [or humble] yourselves therefore to God*.

In their pride the Jews accused others and excused themselves, and a traditionalized law was the perfect instrument for this. It enabled them to boast, but not before God. It enabled them

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to ignore the indictment of Isaiah:

But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as [menstrual] rags, and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities. (Isaiah 64:6-7)

Isaiah is very clear: Israel's righteousness compared to God's Holiness was as if she stood before God clothed in menstrual rags. This is not a very pleasant picture, but it is an accurate one. Israel rejected the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ for the works of her own hands. This was typified in the law by the fact that a woman, on her monthly cycle, was declared unclean until a week after it was ended and she brought the appropriate sacrifice to the priest to offer it for her cleansing. Similarly all who reject the blood of Jesus Christ for the works of their own hands are declared unclean until such time as their minds are changed (repentance) and they trust the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, to cleanse them from all of their sins.

During the first advent of our Lord, Israel (as a whole) declared, *We will not have this man [Jesus Christ] to reign over us.* James wrote to the twelve tribes scattered abroad to arrest their thinking. He sought to change their minds: to bring them to salvation in Jesus Christ. He wrote, *Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.*

How does one resist the Devil? He does so by operating according to the truth of the Word of God. The Word of God plainly teaches the Devil operates in the realm of deception with three weapons: *the lust of the flesh; the lust of the eyes; and the pride of life.* The Devil deceived Eve by casting doubt upon the Word of God and by substituting his lie for that which God had spoken. The Devil promised Eve life instead of death. He promised her she would become *as [Elohim],*

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*knowing good and evil*, if she would disobey Elohim. Therefore the Devil substituted his corrupted morality (the knowledge of good and evil) for God's Word.

The apostle John referred to this lie as *the sin* in his first epistle. Unfortunately the translators did not translate the definite article that precedes the singular noun *sin* in this text. If we supply the definite article and a more appropriate meaning of *poieo* (translated: *committeth*), a free translation of verse four in First John chapter three is: *Everyone making the sin his own* [as a source of righteousness], *makes the iniquity* [the lawlessness, introduced in the garden of Eden] *his own. For the sin is the iniquity* [the lawlessness].

When a man operates in his self-determinate knowledge of good and evil to try to gain acceptance with God, this is the iniquity (the lawlessness) of which John wrote. This is (in every sense of the word) idolatry. Remember, in the verses we quoted from Isaiah sixty-four, it was the iniquity of the Jews which carried them away. It was the iniquity of the Jews which kept them from trusting in the Savior. God's promise to Israel, as well as to all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, is, *Their sins and iniquities will I remember against them no more*. In this context, *their sins* are the overt sins of the flesh, whereas *their iniquities* are their unscriptural concepts of worship.

James's admonition to *resist the Devil* is an admonition to resist man's innate attempts to glorify God by self-effort. As long as the Devil can keep man thinking he can satisfy God by self-efforts of human goodness, the Devil knows man will not submit to the condemnation of the law, nor to salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. However if a man will resist the ploy of the Devil, God will draw nigh to the sinner who will draw nigh to God by faith in the blood of Jesus Christ.

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The individual who submits to God's plan of salvation, by faith in Jesus Christ, will not be rejected of God. Our Lord said: *All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out* (John 6:37). So James admonished the Jews to *Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded*. This cannot be an admonition to self-cleansing. Self-cleansing is reformation, not salvation. It is the way the world thinks. It is the very thing James argued against and is inconsistent with the revelation of the gospel in the Scriptures. A sinner's cleansing comes from only one source. The apostle Peter wrote:

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain [manner of life] received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. (I Peter 1:18-19)

A change in life-style often comes with salvation, but must not be confused with salvation. Such a change is effected by the Spirit of God and the Word of God. However a man may experience a change in life-style from sources other than by faith in Christ. This means a change in life-style is not a good criterion for determining one's salvation. To think it is, is a misconceived idea which has gained popular acceptance in our day.

We frequently hear the testimony, *We know God is working by the changed lives we see*. This is not necessarily true. The Devil has a righteousness and man has a righteousness, but neither is acceptable to God. Both the Devil's righteousness and man's righteousness can produce an outward change in life-style. In fact, the outward life-style of the average Pharisee under Judaism would put the average Christian to shame. Our Lord told the Jews: *For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye*

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*shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven* (Matthew 5:20). By this our Lord sought to convince the Jews of the futility of an outward show of righteousness. Outward righteousness was not the point (the scribes and Pharisees had that down to a science). Genuine righteousness was the point. Therefore the righteousness which exceeded the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees was the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ.

When we consider our Lord's sermon on the mount, in which we have the above quotation, it is evident that our Lord was using the law as a schoolmaster to bring the Jews to salvation. Thus He showed the Jews (who were satisfied with outward show) that God's law demands perfection in both thoughts and deeds. This prompted Him to say: *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh upon a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.* Our Lord also taught the Jews a man does not have to commit murder to be a murderer in his heart. He then concluded these arguments by showing them, if a man is to be accepted of God on the basis of the law, he simply must be perfect. Therefore our Lord said: *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect* (Matthew 5:48).

Thus when James admonished the Jews to *cleanse your hands ye sinners*, he did not encourage them to self-cleansing, but to be cleansed by their identification with Christ. This was an allusion to the rite of the laying on of hands in the Old Testament sacrificial system, where the sinner laid his hands on the head of the sacrifice to identify himself with the sacrifice and the sacrifice with himself. Thus the apostle Paul wrote: *For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him* (II Corinthians 5:21).

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The Jews had been able to maintain a sense of well-being and joy instead of guilt because of their unrealistic interpretation of the law. The traditions of the elders enabled the Jews to have a measure of comfort before the law. Nevertheless, if the Jews had looked at the law for the perfection it required, they should have seen themselves as sinners. The false sense of joy which they had should have been turned into depression. Their laughter should have been replaced with tears. Their sense of exaltation before God should have been humiliation. Therefore James wrote:

Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. (James 4:9-10)

The net result of the humiliation which the law produced could have been salvation if it had performed its *schoolmaster* role, but it did not, in most cases, because the Judaizers, who followed Paul into Galatia, perverted the gospel by the addition of ritual and law to the grace of God. Therefore Paul wrote his epistle to the Galatians to correct this error:

Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed [Christ] should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness would have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. (Galatians 3:19-25, emphasis mine)

Despite Paul's clear teaching on the relationship of a believer to the law, many denominations have added the necessity of ritual and law to the grace of God for salvation. Therefore Paul made his appeal to the Gentiles, and James made his appeal to the Jews of *the*

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*twelve tribes scattered abroad*, so they would both clearly see that a man cannot be justified by the deeds of the law. Justification before God is available only through the grace of God by faith in Jesus Christ. He fully satisfied the righteousness and legal aspects of the law as well as offering Himself as a ransom for sin. Thus He truly is the only way into the presence of God.

## Chapter XVI

### SPEAK NOT EVIL ONE OF ANOTHER

The events and statements in the book of James to this point have been for the purpose of bringing James's Jewish brethren to Christ. Anyone who has ever had the opportunity to witness the truth of the saving grace of Jesus Christ to religious people knows how difficult it is to keep them from dodging the issue of salvation by their insistence that they believe in God. They have no concept of salvation, but they defend themselves by citing their religious values and traditions. Thus the fact that they are religious gives them a sense of self-satisfaction and superiority.

Consequently James's experiences with *the twelve tribes scattered abroad* parallels our experiences with the religious, both in and outside of the canopy of Christianity. Like the Jews to whom James wrote, these individuals often seek to establish their righteousness before God by the common practice of accusing others and excusing themselves. This is a very necessary practice, because it diverts them from their own corruption by providing a sense of relative righteousness. Even so, it is impossible to establish a genuine righteousness before God by such

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a practice: *For there is not a just man upon the earth that doeth good, and sinneth not* (Ecclesiastes 7:20). *As it is written, There is none righteous, no not one* (Romans 3:10).

Consequently James advised his Jewish brethren:

Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another? (James 4:11-12, emphasis mine)

Thus James revealed to the Jews of the *diaspora* that the unscrupulous practice of establishing one's own righteousness by judging others corrupted the righteous concepts of the law. Those who saw others much worse than themselves, whether with the Jews of the *diaspora* or with the religious of our day, violated all that they claimed to keep. So James revealed that such a practice was evil. It certainly did not convey the spirit of the royal law (which they claimed to keep), *thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*. In keeping with this, the apostle Paul wrote:

... thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? (Romans 2:1-3)

It should be clear, the man who seeks to justify himself by judging others does not stand in the righteousness of Christ. He stands in a feigned self-righteousness. There is absolutely no need for a believer to feign righteousness. The believer stands in the perfect righteousness of Christ by faith. Therefore the parade of self-righteousness, which is often displayed at the expense of others, is a manifestation of the double-mindedness of the one who judges others. This hypocrisy and self-righteousness is prima facie evidence that the individual who expresses it is not a child of God. It is strong evidence he is a spiritual bastard.

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The entire human family, apart from faith in Jesus Christ, is dead in trespasses and in sin. Consequently no one has the right to judge another in the matter of sin. For this reason James wrote, *There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?* All that comes from self-righteous judgment is the inflation of the judge's ego, which, as we have seen, has its roots in the sin nature of man.

There is an arrogance which accompanies the self-righteous judge. He perceives all he does is right. He has the attitude he is the master of his fate, he is the captain of his soul. To counter this James wrote:

Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. (James 4:13-15, emphasis mine)

James addressed the self-righteous Jews directly. He attempted to show them that their attitude should have been directed by a concern for God's will. They, like so many in this world, had the attitude that they could order their lives completely. They could go where they wished, when they wished. They could buy and sell and get gain. They could live their lives any way they wished, without regard to the Word of God or to the will of God. Thus they lived their lives as though they were immortal.

Consequently James explained to them (according to the meaning of the Greek text), life is but *an exhalation of a breath* (like a vapor on a cold morning). It appears for a little while, and then it passes away. One moment we have life, and the next moment it is gone. Why then should the purpose of life be missed by so many? Why should a man conceive he could make himself fit

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for God's presence by magnifying the errors of someone else and minimizing his own? The whole practice is folly. It has no basis in logic nor in the Word of God.

God gave Solomon great wisdom in these matters. Consequently Solomon wrote about the purpose of life in the book of Ecclesiastes. In that book Solomon tells us how he pursued all of the things which man counts important to find what a man should do all the days of his life. Solomon amassed great wealth. He enjoyed the pleasures of life. He gained knowledge and he also acted the fool. He tried virtually everything that man counts dear. He determined through his experiments that all of the things man counts important in life are *vanity and vexation of spirit*. This is true because *one event happeneth to them all*. They all die. Therefore if a man dies without placing his faith in Jesus Christ, he dies in vain.

The purpose of life, then, is not to build a sham relationship with God based upon self-righteousness. The purpose of life is to come into a right relationship with God based upon God's promises. Solomon and James agreed completely. Therefore James told the Jews: *But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin* (James 4:16-17).

The man who seeks to justify himself by his own self-righteousness is compelled to boast in his superior sanctity, ability, wealth, station in life, etc. The Lord addressed this problem when He:

... spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto

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heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. (Luke 18:9-14, emphasis mine)

No one in Scripture portrays the self-righteous judge better than the Pharisee in our Lord's parable. That Pharisee was a perfect characterization of the Jewish nation as a whole. According to James's evaluation and our Lord's parable, the average Jew sought to justify himself by finding fault with others.

The natural mind cannot conceive why the Pharisee should be condemned and the publican should be justified. This simply points out the fact that our ways are not God's ways. Man thinks in terms of relative righteousness (graded on the curve), while God operates in the realm of absolute righteousness. This is the essence of the gospel. Therefore the apostle Paul said our salvation is:

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:5-7)

The Jews who trusted in their self-righteousness were in a tenuous position indeed. All of their boastings were born out of an idea of superiority to the Gentiles or by their observance of the traditions of the elders or by their judgment of others. Therefore James wrote, *All such rejoicing [boasting] is evil.*

The result of James's argument was the removal of the Jews' facade. They no longer had a cloak of righteousness in which to hide. Thus they were laid bare before the Lord, Who is the Righteous Judge. The door of self-righteousness was barred. The Jews could not crawl back

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inside. James drove the last nail into the barricade. Then he said, *Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*

James's argument was entirely Scriptural. The Jews should have known that. They could not continue in their facade. They would have to come to grips with the truth. Thus in the next few lines of his letter, James provided the Jews with the information they needed. All they had to do was ask God for the *wisdom, that is from above* and receive it by faith, without wavering. If the Jews would receive the salvation of their souls, they would find the purpose of life. Thus they could say with Solomon of old:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments [through belief in Jesus Christ]: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

*The fear of God*, in this text, was revealed by Solomon when he wrote Proverbs chapter fourteen and verse twenty-seven: *The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.*

## Chapter XVII

### GO TO NOW, YE RICH MEN

At the close of the fourth chapter of the book of James, James wrote, *But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.* This translation does not faithfully represent James's description of the Jews of the *diaspora*. In the Greek text the word translated *rejoice* is *kachaomai*, which means *to glory or boast*. The word translated *boastings* is *aladzoneia*, which means *false pretension, imposture, quackery*, but can also mean *boastings*. *Imposture* would have been a better choice of words for the translators.

Consequently the text should have read, *You boast in your imposture: all such boasting is evil.* In other words they were all show with no substance. They were spiritual impostors, and a part of their imposture was the judgment of others to justify themselves. They also justified themselves by their material possessions -- claiming the possession of wealth was proof of the blessings of God. This imposture is consistent with the Jewish mind as it is revealed in Scripture, and it is consistent with human nature. Therefore the apostle Paul warned Timothy: *For the love*

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*of money is the root of all evil...* (I Timothy 6:10) Paul's statement is more accurately translated: *At the root of all of the evils is the love of money.* Further, Paul revealed, men who are *greedy of filthy lucre* are not qualified for the ministry. They are:

... proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. (I Timothy 6:4-5, emphasis mine)

It should be apparent that the possession of material wealth has nothing to do with godliness. The concept, *gain is godliness*, has come from an extrapolation of the law based upon the assumption that material wealth is a blessing. According to the extrapolation, if one had the blessing (wealth), it was because of his devotion to the law. This extrapolation ignores two important factors. First, no Jew had the ability to perform the deeds of the law. Second, wealth was more commonly obtained by a violation of the principles of the law than it was by adhering to its principles. Thus James described the Jews in their imposture:

Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you. (James 5:1-6)

James used the manner in which the Jews had gained their wealth as evidence against them. They claimed to be justified by the law, but they had gained their wealth by cheating their servants of their just wages. They were steeped in their imposture, calculating every abuse according to the loose structure of *the commandments and doctrines of men*.

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Thus James wrote of a future day of judgment to arrest the Jews, *Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.* This statement is a prophetic disclosure of the miseries that shall come upon the nation of Israel during the great tribulation period, *the time of Jacob's trouble.* At that time men shall seek death and will not be able to find it (Revelation 9:6). They shall cast their silver into the streets, and their gold shall be removed. Wealth will provide no deliverance in those evil days (Ezekiel 7:19).

This present age is an age of grace. God is extending His mercy that men might be saved; but in the great tribulation, Israel and the nations of the world will be judged for their rejection of Jesus Christ as Savior. In those terrible days no one shall be able to justify themselves with their wealth nor hide themselves in robes of self-righteousness.

Man's material possessions and wealth are tenuous at best. Everything man possesses wears out, grows old and becomes useless. Man also grows old and dies. What is the advantage then of riches, or what is the advantage of a cloak of self-righteousness? These things may provide some temporal comfort and prestige, but they cannot provide a proper relationship with our God. Thus our Lord said:

... Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth.

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. (Luke 12:15-21, emphasis mine)

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Man argues that it is necessary to work and to provide for one's family and for one's old age. He asks, *What is wrong with amassing a little wealth?* There is nothing wrong with the proper use of one's resources, given the right priorities. Even so our Lord said:

Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (Luke 12:27-32, emphasis mine)

With these words our Lord did not encourage the Jews to idleness, but spoke of those things which take precedent: *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* (Mark 8:36-37)

Yet the Jews to whom James wrote had cheated the laborers who reaped their harvests in their lust to accumulate more wealth. They boasted that they loved their neighbor as themselves, but this was hardly evident in their dealings with their servants. They did not pay their laborers what they had promised just so they could lay up wealth for themselves. Rather than mourning over their fraud, they boasted they were righteous, and the evidence of their righteousness was the very wealth which they had extorted. Their perverted view of the law (according to *the commandments and doctrines of men*) stripped the law of its *schoolmaster* role. This made the law of none effect as a vehicle to bring them to Christ.

The Jews to whom James wrote are akin to some of our present-day television evangelists. They tell their audiences, *If you want a lot, give a lot.* They use the greed of their viewers as a

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motive to get them to support their ministries. Then they have the audacity to boast, *All that they have is from the blessings of God*. Thus Peter warned:

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not. (II Peter 2:1-3, emphasis mine)

The circumstances which brought about the behavior of those Jews in James's day may be different from the circumstances with which we are confronted in our day, but the sin is the same. The self-righteous still justify their avaricious nature by calling their wealth *the blessings of God*.

James said to them, *Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter*. In other words, they grabbed all they could for themselves in order to satisfy their greedy natures. They gorged themselves on all that they desired as though it were *butchering day* on the farm. Anyone who has lived on a farm understands this statement. Butchering day always provided those present with any cut of meat they wished and as much as they wished (especially before refrigeration).

The abundance possessed by the wealthy had been obtained at the expense of those who labored for them. The laborers went without in order for them to be fat. Therefore the cries of the laborers reached the ears of the Lord of host. Still the Jews persisted in claiming to be just and holy before God. Still they claimed to have kept the whole law and to be righteous before God.

In the name of righteousness, James said, *Ye have condemned and killed the just (Jesus*

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*Christ); and he doth not resist* (Greek: *antitasso*: to post in adverse array, as an army; to battle against) *you*. Even though the nation of Israel had killed their Messiah, God was not waging a warfare against them, but rather was standing with open arms of grace, ready to receive anyone in the nation who would believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. The grace of God is indeed WONDERFUL!

## Chapter XVIII

### ESTABLISH YOUR HEARTS

James's ministry, like our Lord's ministry in the sermon on the mount, allowed the possibility that there were some genuine believers among the Jews to whom he wrote. James had to allow that this possibility existed, because the Jews had been the custodians of the truth prior to the church age. It had been their responsibility to preach the gospel, through the shadows and types of the sacrificial system, until Christ made *one sacrifice for sin forever* (Hebrews 10:12).

The church, made up of Jews and Gentiles, was established to be the custodian of the truth throughout this age. It was given this authority by our Lord prior to His ascension into heaven (Matthew 28:18-20). Israel's authority to continue with the shadows and types of the sacrificial system was taken from her with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Even so, God has not forsaken the Jews. At the end of the church age, at the time of the first resurrection, Israel will be grafted back into the Olive tree. One hundred and forty-four thousand Jews will testify to the truth during the Great Tribulation period. Many will believe through their testimony and will be

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put to death by the antichrist. A remnant (one-third of the nation) will flee into the wilderness until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, when *they shall look on Him whom they pierced* (John 19:37), *And so all Israel shall be saved...* (Romans 11:26).

James's manner of addressing his Jewish brethren has confused his expositors. Most of them have believed James wrote to saved Jews of the *diaspora*, even though this interpretation brings the book of James into direct conflict with the writings of the apostle Paul. This interpretation cannot stand, because it is in violation of the truth: *All scripture is given by inspiration of God*. Scripture must be interpreted in the light of Who God is. He cannot lie; therefore all Scripture, rightly divided, comes into perfect agreement. When it appears not to agree, it is because of human misunderstanding. Thus James continued:

Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. (James 5:7-8, emphasis mine)

There is no hope for an unbeliever in the coming of the Lord. Nevertheless the Jews knew the coming of the Lord meant the kingdom would be established. The Jews also knew God had promised them the kingdom, despite all of their failures. Consequently James exhorted them to be patient unto that day.

This gave James another opportunity to present the gospel to his Jewish brethren. He exhorted the Jews to be like farmers: they were to plant their crops and patiently wait for the early rain. The early rain caused the crop to germinate and spring forth. The next step for them was to patiently wait for the latter rain. This rain would bring their crops to fruition, ready for harvest.

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This description was indigenous to farming in Israel at the time of the writing of the book of James, because the Jews were not allowed to use systems of reservoirs and irrigation canals to irrigate their crops as they had done in Egypt:

For the land, whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs: but the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: a land which the LORD thy God careth for: the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.

And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, that I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. (Deuteronomy 11:10-14, emphasis mine)

There were seven feasts of the Jews that were associated with the early and latter rains.

The early rains were identified with the first three feasts, and the latter rains were identified with the last three feasts. There was one feast in between, Pentecost. The feasts on either side of Pentecost speak of the two advents of the Lord. The first three feasts were fulfilled by the Lord in His first advent, and the last three feasts will be fulfilled when He comes for His saints, and then returns seven years later to establish His Kingdom. Since Pentecost was between the first three feasts and the last three feasts, it speaks of the church age, the time between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel's prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27). These feasts of the Jews may have been on James's mind when he wrote of the patience of the husbandman, waiting for the early and the latter rains to bring forth the coming of the Lord.

With regard to the early rain our Lord spoke to Nicodemus, a Jewish Rabbi, who came to Jesus by night. He flattered the Lord, as a teacher come from God because of the miracles He

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worked, but the Lord ignored his flattery and said: *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again [born from above], he cannot see the kingdom of God* (John 3:3).

Nicodemus was baffled. How could a man be born when he is old? Could he enter into his mother's womb a second time and be born? How could these things be? Then our Lord spoke a parable to Nicodemus, which the translators missed because of the Greek word *pneuma*. *Pneuma* means *wind*. It can also mean *breath* or *spirit*, depending upon the context. In order for our Lord to have spoken of earthly things (which He later claimed He did with Nicodemus), the first and second use of the word *pneuma* (in John 3:5-7) should have been translated *wind*, and *hudatos* (the Greek word translated *water*) should have been translated *rain*.

Rain is an important part of the *earthly things* of which our Lord spoke. There can be no life on this earth without rain. The source of rain is from above. Thus the point of our Lord's parable about *earthly things* is that life (eternal life) has its source from above (in the One Who came from above). Thus our Lord actually told Nicodemus:

Except a man be born of [rain, *hudatos*] and of the [wind, *pneuma*], he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the [wind, *pneuma*] is spirit [*pneuma*]. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born from above [*anohen*]. (John 3:5-7)

Thus our Lord told Nicodemus flesh produces flesh (by natural birth) and the wind of His parable produces spirit (a spiritual birth). This is how one is born from above (by the Word of God and the Spirit of God); therefore Nicodemus needed to be born from above in order to see the kingdom of God. This perplexed Nicodemus, so that our Lord questioned:

Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell

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you of heavenly things? (John 3:10b-12, emphasis mine)

The Lord's conversation with Nicodemus was concerned with spiritual things, but Nicodemus could only think in terms of natural things. Therefore our Lord used the natural to introduce the spiritual to Nicodemus so that he might be born from above.

The wind and the rain were the earthly things of which our Lord had spoken. They made up an earthly parable, which Nicodemus did not understand. How could the wind and the rain cause a man to be born from above? It was then that our Lord explained His parable:

If I have told you earthly things [the parable of the wind and rain], and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God. (John 3:12-21)

The first part of the parable had to do with the *wind*, which represented the work of the Spirit of God. The second part of the parable was related to the *rain*, both the early and the latter rains would be understood, for that was necessary to bring a crop to maturity in Israel. Man has no control over the wind or the rain. And no man can go up to heaven to bring the rains down in order to have a crop on earth. Neither can any man ascend to heaven to bring down the Son of God to effect a Spiritual crop upon this earth.

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The *birth that is from above*, then, like the wind and the rain, is effected entirely by God. The manner in which it is effected was compared to the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness. Nicodemus, like any other Jew of that day, should have known the circumstances surrounding the lifting up of the serpent. He should have known that the serpent was lifted up because of the sin and rebellion of the nation of Israel against God.

As a consequence of Israel's rebellion, God sent a judgment of poisonous serpents into her midst. This judgment would have resulted in the deaths of all who were bitten, except for the intervention of Moses, who prayed for them. God provided a solution to the problem. He told Moses to make a serpent of brass and place it upon a pole. Moses was to lift the serpent up before the people with the promise that if they would look by faith to the lifted-up serpent, they would be saved from the consequences of the poison injected by the serpents. In the typology of Scripture the serpent represents sin, the brass represents judgment, the lifting up of the serpent represents crucifixion, and the pole (made from a tree) represents a curse. Therefore the lifted-up serpent represents the crucifixion of Jesus Christ to effect salvation.

Thus the Lord Jesus Christ came down from heaven to bear the judgment of sin: *That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life* (John 3:15). Like those Jews who were bitten by the poisonous serpents, he that believed was not condemned, but he that did not believe was already condemned; because the only remedy for the serpent's poison was a look of faith, just as the solution to man's sinful condition is found in the judgment of his sins in Jesus Christ upon the cross of Calvary. It is an understanding of the lifted-up serpent in the wilderness that enables us to understand how *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that*

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*whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life* (John 3:16).

The *early rain* represents the first advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. The life that our Lord lived in His first advent fulfilled all righteousness and every jot and tittle of the law. This fact, coupled with the fact that through the virgin birth He was a near Kinsman, qualified the Lord Jesus Christ to be our Kinsman Redeemer. In this capacity He willingly offered Himself as a ransom for sin, when the Jews and the Romans crucified Him on the cross of Calvary. He was then buried and arose again the third day from the dead, which provided the basis for His promise: *Because I live, ye shall live also*. Each of these prophetic fulfillments was an essential part of the gospel, which our Lord commanded should be preached in all of the world until the time of His second advent upon this earth, when He shall establish His Kingdom.

Thus the *latter rain* speaks of the second advent of the Lord, when our Lord Jesus Christ shall come to receive that which has been *born from above* as a consequence of the faithful preaching of the gospel. One day the trumpet shall sound, and our Lord shall come to gather His wheat (the redeemed) into the garner. This will be the harvest James spoke of. This will be the harvest the farmer was to patiently wait for, which was to come forth because of the early and the latter rains.

It would do a Jew no good to patiently wait for that harvest (at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth) if his heart was not *stablished*. The establishment of the heart was a genuine faith in the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ, as opposed to a vain faith placed in the traditions of the elders.

If the Jews had understood the significance of the early and the latter rains; if they had

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understood the significance of the seven feasts of the Jews (Leviticus 23); then, perhaps, James's exhortation would have been unnecessary. They would have already been established in the truth of the saving grace of God by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, but they were not. So James charged the Jews of the *diaspora*:

Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not (Greek: *stenadzo*, to give vent to querulous or censorious feelings, moan, sigh) one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door. (James 5:8-9)

The individual who wishes to try to establish his own righteousness by judging others should remember our Lord said, *With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you*. In other words, you shall be measured with the same measuring rule that you use to measure others. You will also be measured by the perfect Righteousness of God, which is Jesus Christ.

A genuine relationship with the Lord has to be built upon the promises of God. God is immutable, He cannot lie, His very nature is Truth and Love. Therefore if the Jew, or anyone else, wants to come into a right relationship with God, it has to be based upon what God has promised and not upon what man thinks. The Judge stands before the door to judge righteous judgment. Therefore James exhorted them, as well as all who will heed his exhortation, that they were to be established in the faith.

Sadly, there was a deep-seated tendency for the Jews to judge anyone who was less fortunate than themselves. This was apparent in the Jews' attack upon the man who had been born blind, but who had received his sight from the Lord. They considered his blind condition to have been the result of a grave sin. When he sought to give testimony to the Lord, they said, *Thou wast altogether born in sin, and dost thou teach us?*

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James could have reminded the Jews that the entire nation of Israel had suffered at the hands of her various captors; but he chose, rather, to show that the prophets and righteous men, called and chosen of God and revered by the nation, had suffered many things. Thus he wrote:

Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation. (James 5:10-12)

The final trait of the Jews which James dealt with was the matter of entering into vows with God. The New Jewish Encyclopedia gives some insight into the present-day attitude of the Jews toward vows:

The Hebrew term *Neder* (pl. *Nedarim*) is applied to a voluntary obligation which one takes upon oneself in the form of an oath or vow. Laws concerning vows are recorded in the Bible and are treated in detail in a special tractate of the Talmud called Nedarim. There are two kinds of vows, affirmative and negative. The former is undertaken by a person as an obligation to do something voluntarily which is not prescribed by law. The latter is a person's resolution to abstain from something, or deprive himself of certain pleasures which are otherwise permitted. Jewish law provides that under certain conditions vows in the form of promises to God which cannot be carried out, may be nullified by proper authority. No vow made to another person may be dissolved without the free consent of that person. (The Jewish Encyclopedia, Behrman House, Inc., 1962, pg. 507)

Thus the Jews swore their allegiance, as well as their undying devotion and dedication to God, making promises of various sorts: if God would only *bless* them. They, most assuredly, were unaware or had forgotten the exhortation of Solomon:

Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, that to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by a multitude of words.

When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in

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fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? (Ecclesiastes 5:1-6, emphasis mine)

I do not have any first-hand knowledge of when the Jews, by Talmudic decree (according to the Jewish Encyclopedia), were given the right to break their vows to God, but not to man; but it seems to me, judging by the Scriptures, that would be a violation of the first and great commandment:

Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:29b-31)

The obligation to God ought to be greater than the obligation to man, and our Lord made it so in His sermon on the mount. Nevertheless (according to the Jewish Encyclopedia) the Jews were granted the right to break their vows to God (by special decree), but not to man (unless the man involved excused the vow). This is an example of what our Lord meant when He said, *Ye make the commandments of God of none effect by your tradition.*

Despite this negating of the *schoolmaster* role of the law, James had used the law, lawfully, so that he could make an appeal to their hearts. He had established them guilty by the law and had magnified their lost condition before God; but he also recognized, through the sheer numbers of his audience, there could be some genuine believers among those to whom he was writing.

## Chapter XIX

### IS ANY WEAK AMONG YOU?

Like Solomon before him, James had come in his relationship with his Jewish brethren to the place of saying: *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man* (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Was the whole duty of man to try to establish his own righteousness before God? Or was it to see himself, in the light of the commandments of God, totally condemned and incapable of approaching God by the works of his own hands. Indeed, the latter is true. Consequently James asked:

Is any among you afflicted [*kakopatheo*, to endure trials and afflictions, to be dejected, to be miserable]? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms. Is any sick [*asthenes*, without strength, weak, i.e., condemned by the law] among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick [*kamno*, weary, to be worn out from labor, i.e., to be worn out from trying to establish one's own righteousness], and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. (James 5:13-15, emphasis mine)

This portion of the Word of God has been misunderstood by so many. To minimize the possibility of further misunderstanding, we need to pause and remember some basic rules of

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interpretation. First of all, *All scripture* [both Old and New Testaments] *is given by inspiration of God*. One of the first rules of interpretation is the consideration of a text within its context. To wrest a text from its context is to form a pretext.

Thus, in consideration of the context of our present text, to move from the wretched spiritual condition James has shown us was the condition of his Jewish brethren, to a carte blanche physical healing of anyone who is sick, would violate all laws of contextual interpretation. Therefore the text cited above cannot possibly have anything to do with the healing of the physical body. A consideration of all that has gone before causes me to believe this text is concerned with the healing of the soul. Thus it is about the salvation of the Jews of the *diaspora*, which is the central theme of James's epistle.

This interpretation agrees with the original Greek language found in the text. This interpretation agrees with the major theme of the Bible and with the immediate context of the book of James. This interpretation agrees with the fact that Paul had left a fellow worker, Trophimus, sick at Miletum. This interpretation agrees with the fact that the apostle Paul was not healed of his malady when he besought the Lord three times to heal him, but was comforted with the fact that God's grace was sufficient for him.

God is not a respecter of persons. God is immutable. God cannot lie. Nevertheless, historically, all who have invoked the supposed promise of healing by anointing and a prayer of faith have not had their physical bodies healed. Conversely, all who have heard the gospel preached and have entered into the promises in the gospel by a prayer of faith, without wavering, have received the salvation of their souls. Our Lord's irrevocable promise is, *[He] that cometh*

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*unto me, I will in no wise cast out* (John 6:37b).

To this point James's Jewish brethren had been trusting in their own self-righteousness for a right relationship with God. James has shown them the vanity of their faith. He has shown them the weakness of their flesh. James has revealed their condemnation before the law by their observance of the traditions of the elders. In short, James has revealed that they were condemned and in need of the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, as he came to the end of his epistle, James encouraged the Jews to receive the grace of God (as he had previously done in the fourth chapter of his epistle) when he wrote:

But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. (James 4:6-10, emphasis mine)

The reparation between God and man after the fall of man in the Garden of Eden has always been on the basis of the grace of God. It must be. Man is born *dead in trespasses and in sin*. He has a sin nature which makes him *a liar from his mother's womb*. He thinks according to *a way which seemeth right unto a man*. This way is diametrically opposed to God. It was conceived in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and has its source in the wicked one. Everything that unregenerate men do and think is contrary to God's Person.

God's Holiness demands separation from sin. God's Justice demands the judgment of sin. God's Righteousness demands that God is Right in everything He does. God's Mercy demands an atonement (covering) for sin. God's Love demands a provision for fallen man, whom God loves. God's Grace is the vessel through which all of the requirements of a holy God are met in

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behalf of man so that His Mercy may be bestowed upon man. For the obvious reasons that we have previously considered, these attributes cannot be satisfied by man's feeble attempts at law-keeping:

Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:19-20, emphasis mine)

Therefore, *in the fullness of time*, God brought about the solution for the healing of the nations. God's provision was not for the healing of their physical bodies, even though this will come at the resurrection and glorification of the redeemed. God's provision was for the healing of their sinful souls. Thus Jesus Christ bore the judgment of the sins of the human family so that God could be free, in grace, to bestow His love and mercy upon the human family. Therefore immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, God promised:

... I will put enmity between thee [Satan] and the woman, and between thy [Satan's] seed and her seed [Christ]; it [the woman's Seed] shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel [by crucifixion]. (Genesis 3:15)

The fall of man was not a surprise to God. It could not be. God is Omniscient. Therefore God knew what man would do before he did it. This is the reason the Scripture says, *Christ was crucified before the foundation of the world*. This is the reason the Scripture says, *We were chosen, in Him, before the foundation of the world*. When the fall of man occurred, salvation had already been authored by the eternal Christ.

When Adam and Eve sinned against God in the garden of Eden, God pronounced a curse upon all plant life, all animal life and all human life. Thus the human family is under the sentence of death, both physically and spiritually. The logical extension of the curse is that no matter what

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man eats, or how he cares for his body, he is spiritually dead if he does not have his faith in Jesus Christ, and he is in the process of physically dying. Some foods may be better for man than others, but what man eats cannot negate the curse that is upon him and upon the whole earth.

Therefore the apostle Paul has instructed believers that God sanctifies their food through prayer and thanksgiving. This lends comfort in these days of dietary cultist and fear mongers who *command [us] to abstain from [foods], which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer* (I Timothy 4:3-5, emphasis mine). In this same connection, physical exercise has some benefits, but spiritual exercise has greater benefits (I Timothy 4:7-8).

Adam was told, prior to his disobedience, *The day thou eatest thereof, [dying thou shalt die]*. When Adam ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam immediately died spiritually. He also began to die physically. Consequently death works in all of us because of Adam's sin. The moment we are born, we begin to die. We do not call it death. We call it aging. Throughout our lives, we are subject to disease, and we are subject to failures of body parts due to age. Disease and death, then, are very much a part of life (Hebrews 9:27).

If James promised the healing of every sickness through a formula (which called for the sick individual to petition the elders of the church to anoint them with oil and pray a prayer of healing) that would always produce healing, then James promised the lifting of the curse without the resurrection. This would contradict the hope of the believer that is in the redemption of his body at the resurrection:

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For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? For if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. (Romans 8:22-25, emphasis mine)

At the present time, then, believers are God's sons by right of the new birth. When the first resurrection occurs, believers will continue to be God's sons by right of their spiritual births, but they will also become God's sons by right of adoption. Their adoption is very important, because it legally removes any claims of the natural parents upon the children.

Therefore the Adamic nature and resultant curse which is ours as a result of the fall will be removed by the judicial act of adoption. The Adamic nature will be replaced with the nature of Christ. Then we shall enjoy the redemption of our bodies. In the meantime sin, sickness, and death will continue to have its effect upon us; and we shall continue, with the whole creation, *to groan, waiting for the adoption, to wit the redemption of our bodies.*

The *Seed* which was promised in the garden of Eden was confirmed to Abraham about two thousand years after the creation of Adam. The promise was reconfirmed to Abraham's son Isaac. Subsequently the promise passed from Isaac to Jacob and from Jacob to his son Judah. From Judah the promise was passed from father to son and finally rested upon David. From David, through subsequent generations, the promise came to be fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was not only the Son of God, but by His virgin birth He became the Son of Man. This was necessary in order for Him to be the One Mediator between God and man.

Jesus came, then, *in the fullness of time*, to perform the high priestly function of offering Himself as the One Sacrifice for sin forever. The salvation of their souls and acceptance with

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God, which James offered to the Jews, is in Christ and in Christ alone. Thus from the Greek text of our Bible, we understand James told his Jewish brethren: a simple, unwavering prayer of faith shall save the infirmed soul, and the Lord shall give him resurrection life, and the sins which he has committed shall be forgiven him.

In order to be able to offer the unwavering prayer of faith, James gave his Jewish brethren good advice. He told them to call for the *elders of the church*. A new-born babe needs to be attended by capable hands. Therefore James knew his letter would not bring the Jews all the way to salvation. James knew his brethren needed to hear the Word of God preached, so that, once they were converted, they could be baptized and nurtured in the truth of the Word of God by a local assembly of believers.

The church was commanded to go into all the world and preach the gospel. The Bible clearly states that it is *by the foolishness of preaching [that] God has chosen to save them that believe*. Preaching provides the basis for faith, and salvation comes through faith. The Word of God says: *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast* (Ephesians 2:8-9). It also says: *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God* (Romans 10:17).

Since faith comes by hearing the Word of God, James encouraged his Jewish brethren to call for the elders of the church. This was necessary because of the necessity of the spoken Word and the personal ministry of the man of God. It also provided for the immediate baptism of the new convert. The calling of the elders of the church also provided for the assimilation of the convert into the body of Christ, where the new believer could be nurtured in the things of the

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Lord.

The anointing with oil, which was to accompany the prayer of faith, is the quickening power of the Spirit of God through the preaching of the Word of God. Thus the one who offered the prayer of faith would be anointed with the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence the moment he believed the gospel. This anointing is forever. It never leaves the believer. Our Lord said:

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live ye shall live also. (John 14:16-19)

All that James encouraged his Jewish brethren to do is in total accord with the New Testament and with the practices of the early church.

## Chapter XX

### REMOVING THE MASK

As James came to the end of his epistle, he sought to complete the task of removing the mask of self-righteousness from the Jews of the *diaspora*. Israel (as a whole) had worn this mask ever since they had said, *All that the Lord our God hath spoken, we will do*. Paul described them as being *ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, [but they] have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God*.

Our Lord, in His sermon on the mount, and James, in his epistle, both attacked the facade the Jews had maintained through the traditions of the elders. These traditions had virtually removed all of the law's convicting power. Unfortunately, too many Bible teachers and preachers have missed the point of our Lord's messages to the Jews. They have likewise missed the point of James's epistle, because they have applied the sermon on the mount and the book of James to Christians. This is a grave error in the interpretation of the Scriptures. The context demands, with both the Lord and James, that they were using the law, lawfully, in its schoolmaster role, to

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bring the Jews unto Christ that they might be justified by faith.

Throughout our studies we have seen that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil produced *a way which seemeth right unto a man*. This way permeated Judaism. Additionally, it found its way into the local churches almost immediately by means of the Judaizers. These were Jews out of the sect of the Pharisees, who professed faith in Christ, but were false prophets. Everywhere Paul preached the truth of the saving grace of Jesus Christ, they came behind him and corrupted the truth with *another gospel: which is not another*. This so-called gospel required ritual and law for salvation. This appealed to the flesh, as all false systems of worship do; nevertheless, Paul countered this false system when he wrote:

Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. (Philippians 3:4-9)

Saul of Tarsus excelled his peers in Judaism with his observance of *the commandments and doctrines of men*. Nevertheless, when confronted with the righteousness of Christ and the terms of the gospel, Saul counted all of the things which were of personal gain to him as a pile of dung. He realized that none of those things could make him right before a Holy and Just God. Therefore he renounced his position in Judaism, as a Pharisee and an elder in the Jewish Sanhedrin, to place his trust in Jesus Christ. Thus Paul was found in Him, not having his own righteousness, which

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is by the law, but having the righteousness which is of God by faith. This is what James wanted his Jewish brethren to do. Therefore he wrote:

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. (James 5:16-18)

The Greek word for confess in this text is *homologeō*. As we have already seen in an earlier chapter, it means to be in agreement with another. Therefore James's admonition to his Jewish brethren was for them to agree with God and with one another about their faults. By faults, James did not mean the Jews should confess their personal sins to one another. The confession of their personal sins would serve no valid purpose. James meant the Jews should be in agreement with one another and with God about their defection from the faith. What they were practicing was not *the faith, once delivered unto the saints*.

The word translated *faults* is the Greek word *parapipto*. It means *to fall beside, or to fall along the way*. It means the Jews had misappropriated the faith that had been committed to their trust. First, the Jews had corrupted the law with the commandments and doctrines of men so that it had lost its schoolmaster role. Second, they had corrupted the truth of the gospel, which had been committed to their trust in the shadows and types of the sacrificial system. Since the law had lost its schoolmaster role, the sacrificial system could not point the Jews to faith in Christ, but became so much useless form and ritual.

Therefore James's use of the word, *parapipto*, rests in the central theme of his epistle. It is at the core of James's argument in the second chapter, where he compared his faith to the Jews'

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vain faith. It is central to the Jews' need for the wisdom which comes from above. It is central to the Jews' guilt before the whole law. It is central to their spiritual adultery, which is described in the fourth chapter of James's epistle.

If the Jews had not been custodians of the truth, James never would have referred to them as adulterers and adulteresses. In our world, only a wife or a husband can commit adultery. Sexual intercourse between unmarried individuals, neither of whom is married, is fornication. Therefore the spiritual counterpart of adultery is false worship by someone who has been associated with the truth. For example, throughout the Old Testament, Israel is described as God's unfaithful wife. Thus spiritual adultery is committed by those who have had a historical relationship with the truth. An individual believer cannot depart from the truth, but a nation or a church can.

James's appeal to the Jews to confess their faults one to another was to remove the mask of hypocrisy behind which they were hiding. As long as they continued to wear the mask of hypocrisy and self-righteousness, they could not come to salvation. James called for the Jews to do what Saul of Tarsus had done: count the things they had counted gain to be dung. Then their trust could be in the righteousness of God, which is by faith and not in the works of their own hands.

It was imperative that they remove the mask and stand condemned by the law. Salvation is not for people who deem themselves righteous. Salvation is for sinners. Therefore our Lord said, *I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*. Even though James had made an appeal to the Jews to call for the elders of the church if they saw themselves, individually, in

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need of a Savior, James' s primary appeal was national. The Jews' covenant relationship with God called for a national repentance whenever there was a national defection from the truth.

Consequently James admonished his Jewish brethren to *Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed*. This is a call for a corporate confession, prayer and healing. It is akin to Daniel' s prayer in the ninth chapter of his prophecy.

And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: and I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; we have sinned, and we have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries which thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee. O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee.

To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him: neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him. And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth. (Daniel 9:3-13, emphasis mine)

No greater commentary could be written, nor better example given, than Daniel' s prayer of confession for himself, his city and his people. Daniel' s prayer embodies everything James has asked his Jewish brethren to do. Daniel' s prayer and James' s request are centered in Israel' s covenant relationship with God, which required (with any national failure) the nation of Israel to

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return unto the Lord, and He would return unto them.

If the Jews would acknowledge James' s admonition to confess their defection from the faith and to pray for one another, then the possibility of a spiritual restoration, or healing, was promised. This was in keeping with the terms of the Palestinian covenant. Therefore James cited an example of a previous defection and restoration, when he wrote:

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. (James 5:16b-18)

Prayer changes things, especially prayer that is centered in the truth of the Word of God. God's promises are, *Yea and Amen*. He cannot lie. He always fulfills His Word. Therefore no matter what we are like personally, if we pray according to God's Word and in the name of Jesus, we can expect God to answer according to His Word.

In the days of Elijah there was a national defection from the truth. Ahab and Jezebel were king and queen over Israel. They were idolaters. In fact, they had an entourage of eight hundred and fifty false prophets, who were subsidized by the king and queen. These prophets of the groves and of Baal sat regularly at the king's table. Consequently Elijah prayed that the Lord would shut up the heavens and withhold the rains until there was a national repentance on the part of the Jews. The Scripture tells us, *Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are*. In the Greek text *like passions* means he was an ordinary man with ordinary feelings and passions. What James told his Jewish brethren was, God did not answer Elijah's prayer to close the heavens because Elijah was of any extraordinary character, or holiness. God answered his prayer because he prayed on the basis of the Word of God.

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Under the terms of the Palestinian covenant, one of the blessings for Israel, if they observed the terms of the covenant, was the provision of the early and latter rains in their seasons. If Israel failed to keep the terms of the covenant, one of the curses upon Israel was the withholding of the rains. At the time of Elijah's prayer, Israel was in grave violation of the Palestinian covenant. They were steeped in idolatry. Therefore Elijah prayed God to withhold the rains in accordance with the terms of the covenant. Elijah believed, like Abraham, *That what God promised, He was able also to perform.* Therefore God closed the heavens because of His promise in the Palestinian covenant.

Three and one-half years later, Elijah challenged Ahab to bring his false prophets to Mount Carmel. On that mountain there would be a contest. This contest was to show whether Baal was God or whether Jehovah was God. After the eight hundred and fifty false prophets were defeated, Jehovah was proven to be God. Elijah called for the execution of the false prophets and for a revival in Israel. The prophets were killed, and Israel repented of her idolatry.

Then Elijah prayed again. This time he prayed for the restoration of the rains. This prayer was also in accordance with God's promises in the Palestinian covenant. Israel met the terms of the covenant. Therefore Elijah believed God would restore the rains in accordance with His Word. The lesson for the Jews to learn from all of this was that a viable faith is one based upon the promises of God in His Word. This lesson is equally important for us. Consequently their trust should be in the promises of God and not in their own self-righteousness. Thus James made one final appeal:

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death,

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and shall hide a multitude of sins. (James 5:19-20)

Throughout his letter James identified himself with the Jews by the use of the term, *Brethren*. James was critical of them and he knew it. But he was not maliciously critical. James's criticism, like his final appeal, was to direct the Jews to the truth in Jesus Christ. James criticized his brethren to show them that they could not be justified before God by their traditions, no matter how sincere they were in the observance of them.

The Jews had erred from the truth. Therefore all of their form and ritual was vain. What they needed was a viable faith, not an empty, useless one based upon the doctrines of men. James encouraged those Jews who knew the truth to present the claims of the truth to those who did not know it. James instructed them that if they *converted a sinner from the error of his way*, they would save a soul from death.

James was not talking about physical death. He was talking about the second death. He was talking about the death the apostle John spoke of in the book of Revelation. He spoke of the death that would eternally separate the unredeemed sinner from God.

Then James directed his brethren to faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ. With faith in Christ, the judgment that was due the Jews was transferred to Jesus Christ. Therefore the one whose faith is in Christ has his sins forgiven and forgotten. His sins will never be remembered against him anymore. Therefore the prophet Jeremiah promised the eternal forgiveness of sin, based upon the shed blood of a suitable sacrifice. The writer of the book of Hebrews identified the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy with Jesus Christ. Therefore:

... every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this man [Jesus Christ], after he had offered one

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sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.

For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, this is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. (Hebrews 10:11-18, emphasis mine)

James completed his appeal to his Jewish brethren. His appeal to them was not one of overt criticism for the sake of criticism, but rather it was an appeal for them to examine themselves in the light of the Word of God. James did not question them with regard to motive or diligence in the observance of their *faith*, but he did question whether their faith was a viable one.

The prophet Hosea had written centuries earlier, *My people [the Jews] are destroyed for lack of knowledge*. The former Rabbi and member of the Jewish Sanhedrin counsel, Saul of Tarsus who was also called Paul, said of those same Jewish people, *I bear them witness, they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge*.

A lack of knowledge of what God has truly promised can produce an infinite tragedy. Such a tragedy was committed by Israel at the first advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. John wrote of our Lord, *He came unto his own [nation], and his own [people] received him not* (John 1:11). Rather than recognizing that all that our Lord did in His ministry among them was in fulfillment of countless prophecies of the Old Testament, they cried for His crucifixion because *He made himself equal with God*. If they had known their own Scriptures, they would have known that He was indeed God, manifested in human form by means of the virgin birth. They would have known that the *God-Man (El Gibowrh: the Mighty God, the mighty man)* was the *Seed* promised to Adam, to

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Abraham, to David and to the nation of Israel: the one through whom all of the families of the earth would be blessed.

Nearly two thousand years have elapsed and the tragedy continues, for his own still receive him not. His life, death, burial and resurrection have all been explained away by them. And the nation of Israel continues to long for the coming of their Messiah, rejecting the idea that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed their Messiah. Perhaps, if they could be brought to the realization of their grave error, as James attempted to do, many souls would be saved from hell and a multitude of sins would be covered. We rest in the hope of the promise of God:

The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God. For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return: the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness. (Isaiah 10:21-22)

We know that God has promised the salvation of the nation of Israel in the last days. A remnant truly will be saved; however, for them to be saved, they must come by faith in the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ. They must change their minds about Jesus of Nazareth. They must come to believe that He is the Christ, their Messiah. If they will humble themselves in the sight of the Lord, He will lift them up. This promise is true not only of the Jews, but also of the Gentiles.