

James and Unleavened Bread (Part 2)

Practical Religion

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I am going to start right where I left off last week in Ephesians 2, because I think Paul sums up the book of James in a very neat little package.

Ephesians 2:4-5 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).

And the book of James agrees with this wholeheartedly that we have been saved by grace, and not by works.

Ephesians 2:6 And raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

That is, we have been placed into the church of God, and have been given the opportunity to become the sons of God; in fact, one day we will become God in the God Family.

Ephesians 2:7 That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Then he repeats it so that you do not get anything wrong, here.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, [This is clear. We do not need to argue about this at all.], not of works, lest anyone should boast.

James agrees. It was nothing that we did that caused God to look down upon us and say, "I want this one." It is nothing that we have done that merits being saved. He has by grace, through faith, done this for us.

And now, the next verse is where James comes in full bore:

Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Yes, we have been saved from our past sins, by grace through faith. Doing works has nothing at

all to do with our justification when we were called out of the world. That is a legal matter that God does in our behalf. He places the blood of Christ upon us, and imputes the righteous of Jesus Christ to us, and therefore we can approach Him, and come before Him, and serve Him.

But, once God sets us apart, and sets us upon the road to the Kingdom of God, we must obey God's Word, and as it says right here, do good works, actions, and deeds—produce good fruit. We were created for this, just as this verse says. I want to stress that because if we were made for good works, we had better be doing them! Otherwise, we are not doing what we have been created to do.

I showed here last week that this word, "workmanship," has also been translated, "work of art." We are a work of art in progress. Remember last time that I used the potter and the clay analogy. The potter—or maybe a sculptor would even be better—thinks of the clay or stone that he is working with as a work of art in progress. He, God, is working toward a vessel of honor. And that is what Jesus Christ is doing with us. He is the Potter, and we are the clay, and so we need to be cooperating with Him to produce this work of art by overcoming and growing—producing good fruit and doing good—obeying God in all things. And it is these things that James calls in his epistle, "works."

It is that overall, general term in which all those acts—obedience, doing good works, overcoming, producing good fruit—are all in that one word.

Now, to review justification for just a moment, one of the main themes in the book of James, I said, is faith with works. You have to have works, and you have to have faith. And this section from James 2:14 to 2:26 is the apostle James going through this theme, so we will not misunderstand.

James 2:14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can [this kind of] faith save him?

If you have a faith without works, can it save you? Obviously, no!

James 2:15-16 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?

He brings forth this example of what he means. What if someone comes in who is poorly clothed for the season or weather, and does not have the means to do better, and even has no food at home, would our saying to him, "Be warmed and filled," going to do him any good? Our saying, "Be warmed and filled," equals faith without works.

You actually have to help the person by doing something for them in order to fulfill that faith. Just saying nice things to somebody is not going to help them if they need food and clothing.

James 2:17-19 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is

dead. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." I say, 'Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.' You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!

So, if we have faith only, we are no better than the demons! That is not saying much about us if we just have faith only. The demons have faith more than that because they are scared—they know what God is, and what He can do.

And sometimes, if you will notice the Protestants, they do not even tremble. They despise the law that brings on the curse—the penalty—without any fear.

I do not mean to prop up the demons, really, but at least the demons tremble before God. And it is because He can punish them, and they know the penalty that is coming upon them, whereas, somebody who believes in faith only does not believe in a penalty.

James 2:20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

You are quite the fool if this attitude is in you. "You should know this," James says. He is not being very nice to them right here.

James 2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?

Remember I suggested that it would be better translated, "shown to be upright." "Was not Abraham shown to be upright by works when he offered Isaac on the altar?"

James 2:22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?

You see, when Abraham did works, it showed God that he actually did have faith. It showed the world that he did have faith. And, it perfected his faith. Faith alone is incomplete. If you do not produce works with that faith, you will always remain incomplete. But, once you put them together—faith plus works—it is a complete package.

And, God says, "I was right. He [Abraham] did have faith."

People out in the world are looking at you, seeing your example, will say, "Wow! He did have faith. Twenty years ago he joined this crazy religion. But now, just look at him! He is a paragon of the community! He has done well and right, because God has blessed him. He has followed God, and obeyed, and he is now a complete man."

This is just an example, but that is how it can be.

James 2:23-26 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified [shown to be upright] by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified [shown to be upright] by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Summing this all up to this point, Paul uses the word, "justification," in a legal sense. God, seeing our belief declares us to be righteous in His sight by allowing the blood of Jesus Christ to be placed on us to cover our sins, and then imputes Christ's righteousness to us.

But James, on the other hand, uses the word, "justification," in an evidential sense, meaning it is illustrative, and active—it is how justification reveals itself in a person. A person who has faith and has been justified in the legal sense by God will show it through good works.

So, again, Paul uses the word, "justification," in a legal sense, while James uses it as it manifests itself in a person who has already been justified.

Referring back to the little seed [the walnut] analogy, I want to remind you that God sees your faith as it is in the seed. He sees that inside that seed is a full-grown tree. Nobody else can see that except God Himself. And then, when the seed is planted in the church, and it grows up, that is where James' idea of justification comes to the fore.

When you start growing and producing fruits, then it shows that you are upright. God was correct when He justified you as the seed. And now that the tree is grown and bearing fruit everybody else can see that you have indeed been justified.

Now James had to include this in his epistle because some believed that Paul meant in his writings to the Galatians and the Romans that all one had to do was believe in Christ, and we would be saved. Both James and Paul agree that that is not true. It takes more than just belief to be saved.

James is saying, "That it is not quite that easy. Paul didn't tell you the whole story." Then again, we can say that Paul did tell us the whole story, but people did not want to hear it. And so, James, once again, had to tell them what the whole story was. If you had just faith, even though it is in Christ and God, it is dead and worthless and useless without any works.

That is what he said. That word, "dead," in verse 20 did not come from the Greek word, "necros," which is the typical word for dead, like a dead body. But, here it is from the Greek word, "argus," which means barren, and ineffective.

That is not the first translation. It probably should be, "dead." But, this alternate translation is interesting in itself. What is a dead body? It is barren and ineffective; it is useless, worthless, futile, vain, and cannot produce anything.

So, God's way of life is always outward and outgoing, giving, sacrificial, and active all at once. God's way is productive and progressive—it moves forward, and produces. But, if we stay still,

and are static, we are actually going backward. We are just having faith without works—and it is dead.

You remember that the law of entropy (which we heard just a few weeks ago) is the law that says that everything in nature tends toward disorganization, degradation, disarray, and disintegration. Things tend to fall apart. Things tend to go their own way and produce confusion.

Say that you own a hay meadow at the edge of the forest, and you quit mowing the meadow. After many years, the grass would give way to the new trees that spring up because it is not taken care of, and is no longer fit for making hay without grubbing and clearing, and making new. This is part of the law of entropy. Things tend toward disarray and wildness.

A Christian can get caught and carried away in this entropy, and actually begin moving away from God back toward the world if he fails to put Christianity into practice.

So, faith and works are inseparable. If we have one without the other, they are both dead, lifeless, worthless, and meaningless. Nothing happens. If you have works without God's Spirit and faith in God, they cannot really produce anything righteous. They may salve a wound, or cover something for a while, but in the end, they are just vain. If you have faith only and no works, nothing gets accomplished at all.

So exactly as a body is dead without the spirit of man, so also is faith dead without action, deeds, and works. That summarizes this whole section; you got to have both.

So with this understanding as a background, let us go through some of the practical matters that James discusses throughout the epistle.

James addresses problems that would at one time or another affect every congregation. I think that is why he included them. Sometimes it is that every church member goes through these things at one time or another.

I want to start in James 3 because to do good works properly you have to have the right kind of wisdom to do them. So we will begin with a contrast between worldly wisdom, or Satan's wisdom, and God's wisdom. They literally are like the difference between darkness and light—between black and white—they are polar extremes. We need to get them separate, and understand what they are all about before we can go into these other things.

James 3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.

He has just gone through the section regarding the tongue, which he prefaced by saying, "Who wants to be a teacher among you? Do not let many become teachers because they will receive the stricter judgment." But here in verse 13, he is assuming that there are a few who have the aptitude to be teachers, and he is saying to make sure that they are wise and understanding people. And then he goes on to explain what their motivations should be, and what they should not be. This is where we get into the differences between demonic and Godly wisdom.

James 3:14 But if you [teachers] have bitter envy and self-seeking in

your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.

If you have these motivations, do not deceive yourselves, or anybody else, by thinking that you are doing this for good. What you are doing is boasting and lying; you are being arrogant about it; you are going about it in the wrong way, and it is deceptive.

James 3:15-18 This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Referring back to verse 14 first, it shows there that the worldly wisdom, or the demonic wisdom with its source in Satan the Devil, is motivated by bitter envy and self-seeking.

Now, this bitter envy is a cynical, harsh, almost hateful jealousy. The word envy is, "zealous," which is often translated as zeal, jealousy, and (one time) indignation. But, bitter is hateful, spiteful, and doing it for all the wrong reasons, combined with this zeal is really terrible and demonic—doing things for the wrong reasons. And when it is combined with self-seeking and selfish ambition, it can cause a lot of problems.

If a teacher arises in the church, and his motives are to get a position of importance and advance himself over the body of Christ, this person is in the grip of Satan the Devil. He is being motivated by demonic wisdom.

James admits that it is *a* wisdom. But it is not the *correct* wisdom. Wisdom is the application of knowledge and understanding. And if you are applying this knowledge in a bitterly zealous manner, only to get something for yourself, that is the exact attitude of Satan the Devil.

It says in Ezekiel 28 that he was the perfection of wisdom when God created him—Satan the Devil. And, he was beautiful. But he became filled with pride and vanity.

Combine this with the remarks God makes about Satan in Isaiah 14 you can see that this made him rebel against God. He wanted to become God. And this is the same attitude that can grip people in the church if they are full of bitter envy and self-seeking. They can cause the same sort of damage that Satan the Devil did.

He destroyed this solar system in his war against God, and maybe parts of the universe too. I do not know. But, just in this physical sense, you can see the damage that his "wisdom" can cause.

And it says this "wisdom" is earthly, worldly, and profane, meaning that it has no link at all with heaven. It is also said to be sensual, physical, and carnal, again no link at all with the proper spirit. It is demonic, satanic, and evil. It has no link at all with God. God will have nothing to do with this sort of attitude. It will produce at the very least confusion. Where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion will exist. That is the least that it will do. It produces disorder,

disunity, and instability within a congregation.

Have we not all seen that happen?

In some areas there were some very ambitious and very hard ministers. They started as a lay member in the church who became a deacon; and then became an elder; and then became a minister; and then a pastor; and then a senior pastor; and then an area coordinator; and then an evangelist; and then department head; and then a regional director; and then the pastor general. I do not want to accuse, but look at the proof—disorder, disunity, confusion, and instability.

And what happened to the sheep that were in these congregations? They were abused, used, starved, worked, experimented upon, and worst of all led astray—spiritually murdered.

James says that at the worst, this kind of satanic wisdom produces every evil thing. There are no bounds to the kinds of evil that this wisdom produces. And the worst thing of all is to turn even one of God's children off the path of righteousness. This is very, very serious.

I began here with this section because the attitude of godly wisdom must begin with the teachers in the congregation—the ministry, deacons, and other leading men in the congregation who get up in front of the congregation and teach. It must begin there. And each minister and teacher must examine his motives often, and resolve never to follow the way of this devilish, envious, and selfish course of wisdom.

If he is doing right, and if he is going by the godly wisdom, as it is taught and practiced, it will flow down to the other people of the congregation. They will see the examples. They will hear the examples. They will learn what is being taught, and it will produce peace, order, harmony, and godly fruit in that congregation. And hopefully, eventually, it will flow down through the entire church.

I am not going to go through the godly wisdom in a major way today. But, James 3:17 has seven words or phrases that describes the godly wisdom. You have an assignment to make this verse a Bible study. Take one word or phrase a day—it will take you a week—and search out what that word or phrase really means, because it is something so basic to our life as Christians that we ought to have these things indelibly imprinted in our minds, and to be thinking about them every time we act, especially when we are in any kind of leadership. The leader should be all of these things.

I do want to highlight verse 18 a bit. We saw that Satan's wisdom produces confusion, disorder, disunity, and every evil work; but God's wisdom produces peace. It is the exact opposite of what Satan's [wisdom] produces.

Peace comes from the Greek word, "eirene," which is where we get the female name, "Irene." This word means, "right relationships." Godly wisdom produces right relationships, not only among people, but between us and God. It goes through the whole spectrum that we not only get along, and are in unity and harmony with each other, but that it extends to God as well—that we are at peace with Him too.

We will have harmony of purpose, doctrine, and of action. We will be doing the same things, and

thinking the same things. And in an atmosphere of peace and harmony among us, we will definitely produce the kinds of fruit and good works, and overcoming that God wants to see.

That is what He says here. Earlier in chapter 1, verse 20, the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Then, in verse 18 of chapter 3, he puts it in a positive sense. He says, "A peaceful church with an atmosphere of peace will produce the righteousness of God." Wrath cannot do it. Peace will.

When you have peace, then you can get to work, and everybody will work with you.

Haggai 2:15-17 And now, carefully consider from this day forward: from before stone was laid upon stone in the temple of the LORD—since those days, when one came to a heap of twenty ephahs, there were but ten; when one came to the wine vat to draw out fifty baths from the press, there were but twenty. I struck you with blight and mildew and hail in all the labors of your hands; yet you did not turn to Me,' says the LORD.

Now, which way were they working with? They were working with the devilish, demonic, earthly, sensual type of wisdom. They had stopped working on the temple of God. What were they doing? In their selfish ambition they were building their own houses, and furthering their own activities. And, God said that He cursed them for this. This evil wisdom produces every kind of evil work.

Haggai 2:18-19 Consider now from this day forward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day that the foundation of the LORD'S temple was laid—consider it [think!]: Is the seed still in the barn? [It should have been planted.] As yet the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have not yielded fruit. [Why? Their wrong attitude.] But from this day I will bless you."

So, if the seed is not in the barn, it must be in the ground. If we have planted seed, should not we expect a crop? Yes. That is what we put it in the ground for.

Ask yourself, up until now, have we seen much growth? Maybe yes, maybe no. Not as much as could have been. We have not had an atmosphere of peace like we should have had. The greater church of God has been terribly un-peaceful lately. It is like there have been "sheep wars" going on. That cannot be peaceful.

Maybe we have been too long in contention, in disunity, and disharmony with the other brethren. Such a condition will not produce fruit. When we are fighting for position, when we are seeking our own advantage, and not meekly submitting to one another under the Mighty Hand of God, how can we expect to produce anything that God wants? It is inconceivable!

But now, if we would all strive to make peace, to be in harmony, to have accord, to be in unity with each other, we would then produce a harvest of righteousness.

I really wish they would have translated it this way in James 3:18. The word does mean fruit, but it means so much more—all the fruit of the harvest. "Now the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

We just heard in the offertory—II Corinthians 9:10:

II Corinthians 9:10 Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness,

Once we start doing these things in the proper godly wisdom, our harvest will increase and abound in righteousness. That is what we are aiming for. Not necessarily prosperity—God will give us our daily bread, but we will produce a harvest of righteousness if we can have peace. And we can have peace if we start acting in godly wisdom.

So the lesson here is that in godly wisdom let us work on producing harmony among ourselves, and we will produce a righteous harvest for God. If we do this, all the others should fall into place. Once we have the right attitude, we can start making all of these things work.

The next section begins in the next chapter of James. He is going to show us what the cause of sin is, and how we can keep from sinning.

James 4:1-10 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

If both the leadership and the membership of the church are operating according to Satan's brand of wisdom, we will get confusion, division, strife, and as shown above, war! It will develop sooner or later; it is only a matter of time. War, murder, covetousness, lust, adultery, and enmity against God—every one of these have their roots in pride. That is why he goes into that. God resists the proud. Why? Because they are sinning, and he cannot stand sin. He does not abide it. He goes off and away, as it were.

There is a great gulf between men who sin, and God. Of course, God resists the proud. They are not obeying Him. So, James gives the solution in verses 7 through 10.

He says first, submit to God. This is the paramount thing to do. If you submit to God, these other things come along easier. Submit to God, and His commandments.

Secondly, resist Satan the Devil. The Devil is the source of this proud attitude. As I said, this is the same attitude that led to his own rebellion against God, and created all this devastation. If you resist Satan, and his broadcasts of his proud attitude, he cannot have any power over you. He will leave you alone (for a while).

Why is that?

He cannot work with you if you are not proud. He likes to work with people who are just like him. If you are proud, it does not take much to push your buttons to get you to do something that he wants you to do—to get you to sin.

So, James says to stay away from Satan. Resist him. Do not let him get to you and start to push your buttons because you have got a proud attitude.

A humble person does not think very highly of himself. But who was it that did think very highly of himself? Satan the Devil. He likes that attitude in others too. A humble person does not have ambition that pushes him to run over others. That is what Satan wants to do. He likes to make a mess of your life.

A humble person looks out for the interest of other persons, does he not? But a proud person wants everything for himself, and he does not care who he runs over, or beats up in the process just so he can get what he wants.

A humble person helps other people. Does Satan ever help anybody? A humble person admits error, but has Satan ever admitted doing any wrong? I do not think so.

A humble attitude is directly opposite to pride. The proud are easily swayed to Satan's way. So, resisting Satan is vital to being humble. You do have to put your dukes up and fight him by being humble.

The third thing James says is to draw near to God, and He will in turn draw near to you.

This is another way of saying, "Patch up your relationship with God. Become more intimate with God. Get closer to Him, just like a man and a woman gets closer to each other as they date. They draw so close to one another that by the time they marry, they are ready to become one flesh." This is what James is saying. Become one with God by drawing near to Him.

The fourth thing he says, here, is to cleanse your hands and your hearts. He is saying to overcome your sinful acts—your hands; and your attitude—what is in your heart. You have to do this. You have to put out the leaven. You have to overcome sin. Do not let sin dwell with you. Get rid of it. That is another way to become humble.

The fifth thing from James is to lament, mourn, and weep, and let your laughter be turned into mourning. This is a very important point. Be sober about your life. We have been called to a very serious church—serious minded about our calling and purpose.

This is a very great compliment. We are looking at what is most important, and we have to be serious about that because where we are, and when we are—this is the end time, no doubt—time is drawing short. God wants a bride prepared for His Son. We had better get about doing that, and be serious about our calling. We do not have to be gloomy all the time; that is not what James is talking about. We can laugh, and have fun, however, we should be very serious about what God wants us to do. So what should our priorities be? "Seek first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness..." before our own pleasures.

The sixth thing James contributes is to choose to be humble. Always see yourself in relation to God, "in the sight of the Lord." Do you see His perfection? Realize your own imperfection. Do you see His greatness? Realize your own worthlessness and limitations. Do you see His eternity? Realize your own temporalness and vanity.

The results of such an attitude in having a proper perspective of ourselves in relation to God—just the opposite of what our nature would think—is that we will be exalted. I did not say that we are going to grovel, but we will be exalted for being humble. It almost does not seem to make any connection, but it is the truth. That is the way it should be.

When you humble yourselves before God, *He* will lift you up—not yourself. He will be the One to reach down and lift us up, rather than us climbing the ladder, stabbing people in the back to have that exalted position.

So the lesson here is that pride is the source of sin, but humility can put us on a right footing before God.

We will now go on into the next section.

James 1:9-10 Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away.

James 2:1-4 My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

James 2:8-13 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of

liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

James 4:11-12 Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?

Okay, admit it. We are all bigots of one kind or another. We all show partiality either to some race, or some ethnic group, or some class of person, or some occupation, or some religions—whatever you hold in great contempt.

Take race for example. The liberal element in this country, like the media who seems worst at this, would have you believe that only white conservative men are racists. They tell you that they hate blacks, Hispanics, Orientals, Jews, and lawyers, and government; and that they will beat, rob, and kill to get their way. They will tell you that all white conservative men are neo-nazis at heart, and wish to exterminate everybody else one way or another so that they can have it all to themselves.

That is hogwash.

We are all bigoted, but we do not all go to this same extreme. It is true that there are these kinds of people who might act this way. But I know some black folks who have utter contempt for white people. They will not live in a white neighborhood. I know of Hispanic people who will have nothing to do with Koreans, Cambodians, Malaysians, Japanese, Chinese, blacks, or Jews. I know of some of these other groups who, again, act this same way. I know some Jews who think that they are the chosen people, and everybody else is a gentile and worthy of utter contempt.

Why is this?

It is human nature. We all believe that we are the pinnacle of creation! And, anybody who is like me must be pretty close to being perfect too, so we all love our own. But, anyone else who is not quite like us is contemptible. This is an extreme, but we look down on people, and everybody thinks his own kind is superior.

But in the church of God, as it says in James 1: 9, we are all children of God. We have all been brought to the same level.

James 1:9-10a Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich [glory] in his humiliation.

We have been all put into the same mix together. How can we have partiality to our brethren in the church? We are all heirs of the Kingdom of God. It says in Ephesians 2 that the wall of separation between us has been broken down by Jesus Christ, and we have been commanded to become one—one Bride, one body, one church, under one God, with one faith, one baptism,

and one Spirit.

In these next two verses, James puts it first positively, and then negatively.

James 2:8-9 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

We bring these things into the church with us from the time of our conversion, because we are all fighting that human nature. It is just a part of us that we have to recognize and get out of our lives.

He says that if we start judging our brothers, we become judges with evil thoughts. This is not the judgment that Jesus did. Jesus judged righteous judgment. He judged sin. He did not judge somebody by what kind of clothes he wore, or what color skin he had, but he judged him by His righteousness.

But then again, if somebody was a sinner, he did not put him down, he did not show partiality in that, but he judged righteous judgment.

Look to what He could have done to the woman caught in adultery. He is Judge of all. She was caught in the act. What a sinner! But what did He say? "Get rid of the sin, and do not do it again." Repent! Sin no more! He did not treat her as the dirt that He could walk on. Who knows, that woman might have been called later into the church of God. She was a whore. How would we treat her if we knew?

Think of the apostle Paul. He had people dragged into prison, and was present when Stephen was martyred. These church members had to face him. He had to face them. He became over them as an apostle. We must always be careful how we treat our brothers. Who knows, that one who comes in with filthy garments may be over you in the Kingdom of God.

James concludes this section by telling them to remember that they, too, are under judgment. If you show mercy, it will be shown unto you, but if you show condemnation, you will be condemned. It is better to be merciful, than to be condemnatory. Mercy triumphs over [condemnatory] judgment. Which is better? To be merciful, or to apply the strict letter of the law? That takes godly wisdom.

Jesus said, "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged." (Matthew 7:2) Paul wrote in Philippians 2:3, "In lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself," just like Jesus Christ did. So, do not be bigoted, but rather give each other preferential treatment as we are all children of the living God.

In this next section, James talks about the tongue.

James 1:26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.

James 3:1-12 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

James 5:9-12 Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes," be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment.

In these three passages on the tongue James tells us that we must be constantly on guard about how we use our tongue. The tongue is the hardest part of our self to control.

It says here that no man can tame the tongue. It is that hard to get a grip on. It is that hard to control what you say.

And then James says that if we do use it correctly, we are perfect—"this one is a perfect man if he can bridle his tongue, if he does not stumble in what he says." The tongue gets us into more hot water than anything else. It says here that it can set the entire world on fire. One word spoken out of place can ruin someone's life—yours, or theirs.

We can see that it is a major part of overcoming. I do not know how many people even among us in a small group have been offended by what one person has said to another, about another.

Even if you do hundreds of good things for others, if you observe all that you know that is

righteous, but your tongue is sharp, critical, boastful, gossiping, slanderous, deceitful, and relentless, your profession of religion is vain, useless, worthless, and futile.

These ideas are all found in James 1:26. Even if you do all these things, but your tongue is not controlled, everything you do is utterly vain. You can throw away all your good works if your tongue controls you, instead of you controlling it.

How many of our brethren have been offended because we say something without thinking? Or in anger and frustration? Or with sarcasm and bitter humor? Or in the wrong place at the wrong time? Maybe hundreds?

James 1:19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;

And he means it. Consider what you say. Take great pains about what you say, and how you react to other people, and how they react to you when you speak. He says to put a bridle in it. Rein it in. Like a pilot or helmsman guides a ship, control your tongue, because we have got to work on this thing which keeps creeping out between our lips and teeth, getting us into more trouble than we are worth.

Proverbs 10:19 In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise.

If you talk a lot, be aware that there is quite likely a sin in there somewhere. And we keep coming back to that word, "wise."

Proverbs 18:21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

Using it wrongly means that you are going to eat the fruit of using it wrongly. If you use it rightly, then you will eat the better fruit, the good fruit of using it rightly.

Proverbs 13:3 He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction.

That is easy to understand.

Proverbs 21:23 Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles.

Pretty much the same thought.

There is no magic solution to this perennial problem of the tongue. It just takes you to control your thoughts, and control what comes out of your mouth. Paul said to bring every thought into

the captivity of Christ Jesus. (II Corinthians 10:5)

If we control what happens up here in our mind, then we can control what comes out through here at our mouth. There are no magic formulas for this.

So, the lesson here is, "Shut your mouth." I hate to be blunt. If this is not possible, guard very carefully what you say. God will judge you by the words you speak. Scripture even says "every idle word" that you speak will come into judgment. So, be careful.

I need to skip over James 1:11 and 4:13-16 because you will be hearing that subject this afternoon. And you heard some of it last week—it is on vanity.

The idea here is that you should never let God stray very far from your thoughts. Make Him a part of every second of your life. This section is about the part of, "we are going to go into such and such a city, and do this or that," and James says, "No! That is so proud and arrogant. You have forgotten that God has to be with you when you go there to that city to do this or that." Rather you must say, "If God wills, if He wants me to do this, then I will go and do this or that." But, if you are doing things without God, you are going right back to the arrogant, proud, vain, demonic wisdom of Satan the Devil.

Keep God included in your thoughts, then you are more likely to stay humble, and on the right side of God.

James 2:5-7 Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?

"Listen my beloved brethren." James says this a lot. I think it would be worthwhile to go through on your own and note how many times he says to listen, hearken, to be careful how you hear, and be alert.

James 5:1-6 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth [Hosts]. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.

The rich have a reputation for oppression. Those who have more often use others who have less. The rich, because of their wealth, are powerful; and the poor, because of their poverty, are

weak. Money is power (in this world).

The poor and weak are dependent upon the "generosity" of the rich. And when the rich start abusing the poor, the poor often have no recourse except to submit, and take it patiently, and endure it. They are weak. They cannot fight back.

Obviously, this should not be. We all say that the rich should not oppress the poor, and the powerful should not oppress the weak. But it is a fact of life.

And, the fact that it happens does not excuse the rich when they act this way. And if anybody among us is guilty of such oppression, "Woe to him!" James says. Your sin will come up before the Lord of Hosts, that Great and Mighty God. He will avenge it!

In the Psalms and Proverbs it says that God will take vengeance on behalf of the weak. He is a father to the fatherless. He helps the widow in her distress.

Now, before you say that you are not among the rich, remember that the term, "rich," is generally for anyone who has power. You could be the poorest man in the world, yet have a wife and children whom you have power over. In that sense, you are rich in power. And, you can still oppress them.

This could be a minister, or deacon, or some other leader in the congregation, or even a host to one of the teleconferences; a father; a mother; an elder child; an employer; a supervisor. It could be anyone who has some power or authority over another for some reason or another.

Now see if you can answer, "Yes," to any of these questions:

1. Have you ever used your position for your own advantage?
2. Have you ever put someone down who is under you when he has a suggestion, question, or critique?
3. Have you ever had someone under you do something for you that you should have done yourself—but you made him do it?
4. Have you ever imposed on somebody under you when you knew that they were already busy doing something else that was more important? But you imposed your will without any consideration about what they were doing.
5. Have you ever made somebody do something your way when he had an alternate method that was just as good?
6. Have you ever vetoed someone's ideas just because, "that's not the way that we do it around here"?
7. Are you inflexible and rigid?
8. Are you harsh and quick tempered?
9. Are you hard to be approached?
10. Do people fear to talk with you or ask you a question?

If you have answered "yes" to any of these questions, you might be guilty of oppressing your

brother, or your son, or daughter, or mate, or employee, or your brethren in the church—you need to overcome this fault.

Always deal with your brethren considerately, kindly, and gently, as fellow children of God. They just might be over you in the Kingdom of God.

James 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

James 2:15-17 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

James 5:16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

James 5:19-20 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

Well finally! We have gotten to the part where most people think of good works—doing practical deeds for one another. But, as we can see, this aspect of works gets only seven verses in the whole book, out of five chapters, regarding these practical hands on type of things. And I believe the reason for that is that everybody knows that you should be doing them. So, James emphasizes the others—the overcoming, the growing, and the controlling of oneself, learning godly wisdom, removing pride, putting on humility, and learning to produce these things, getting them to be a part of our character.

But we *can* do some of these things. We are all spread out, I know. Some folks do have congregations to meet in, but some do not. But even then, the congregations are quite small.

But, we can visit those who are sick. We can write and send letters. We can make phone calls. We can maybe send money or other things when we know of a certain need. We all know to do these things.

I believe, most importantly, as it states in James 5:16, we need to always pray for one another. If we cannot be with them all the time, we can pray for them. And that prayer, when and if it is fervent, and you really mean it—remember that James said earlier that if you doubt it will be done, then it will not be given to you. So, ask in faith so that your brethren will be granted peace and prosperity, and health, and move along in the course of righteousness.

And also, if we see someone going astray, we can help lead them back gently, and patiently, covering a multitude of sins in the process.

There are a lot of ways we can help each other. So, the lesson is that when you see a need, see what you can do to fill it. It is just that simple.

(Well, I guess I cannot get to the prophecy today. I will have to make it into a sermonette or a sermon some other time.)

This final part is the summary statement of all I have brought you today.

James 4:17 Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

We know to do good works. We know it is a part of righteous living, and that we have been created for it. That is why we are here on this earth. It is part of the process of salvation. God called us, and chose us, and granted us repentance, justified us, placed us in His church, and now we have been created to do good works. We know it. And once we know it, we are under obligation. If we fail to do them, we are not obeying one of God's direct commands, and we are sinning—missing the mark. We have failed to reach the standard. We have strayed from the path.

So, do not just remove the leaven—the sin in our lives—but also eat the unleavened bread by doing good, not only to become righteous to be in God's Kingdom, but so that we can also help others to be there too.

So we have come full circle from where I started going through those twelve different times where it says, "You shall eat unleavened bread."