

Book of James

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Structure of Chapter One

Introduction	Verse 1
The Prayer of Faith	Verses 2-11
Enduring Tests	Verses 12-18
Doers of the Word	Verses 19-27

Lesson One: The Prayer of Faith

Verse 1:

“James”

James the half-brother of Jesus is the author of this inspired book. As Mark wrote, “Is not this the carpenter [Jesus], the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him.” Mark 6:3 These brothers and sisters were the children of Joseph from a previous marriage. Joseph’s first wife dies and then he marries Mary. Paul affirms that James was the half-brother of Jesus, saying, “But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.” Galatians 1:19

“Servant”

According to Acts 12:17 and Acts 15:13, it seems evident that James, the brother of Jesus, was the head elder of the church in Jerusalem. He presided over the Council in Jerusalem concerning the dispute over circumcision.

Knowing that James, the brother of Jesus, played such an important role in the early church, he could have addressed himself as the “head elder” or some other high title, but he does not. He refers to himself as “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” The word for “servant” is the same word for “slave.” Therefore we could conclude that (1) James had received the humility of Jesus, and (2) that the role of a leader in the early church was one as a servant. Leadership is not about power, rather it is about service to others.

“Twelve Tribes”

While the principles, lessons, and truths contained in the book of James are for all Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, James does address this book “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.” Elsewhere in the book he seems to refer to those with Jewish descent. In 2:21, he says, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?” The reference to Abraham as our “father” is a very Jewish saying. But James does not seem to be writing to unconverted Jews, but to those who have accepted Jesus as the Messiah. As James writes, “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.... 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.... 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.” James 1:1, 12; 5:7. In these verses, and in other verses, we find an ongoing reference to Jesus as the Lord.

“Scattered abroad”

The ten tribes of Israel had been dispersed by the invasion of the Assyrians. The tribes of Judah were dispersed by the invasion of the Babylonians. The Jewish nation had become a scattered nation. At the time of the early church, the Jewish people remained scattered throughout the world.

But God was to turn this dispersion into good. Because the Jewish synagogues were scattered among the nations, the early believers were able to find synagogues to preach the good news about Jesus as the Messiah. While most Jews did not accept Jesus as their personal Savior, thousands did accept Him. Through these early Jewish converts the gospel spread quickly throughout the ancient world.

The Prayer of Faith, Verses 2-11

Verse 2

“My brethren”

If you want to teach someone about prayer or Bible truths, how should you relate to them? James teaches us to see each other as a brother or sister in Christ. In fact, James uses the term “brethren” fifteen times in his epistle. Tragically in our world, men like to set up hierarchies. But in God’s true church we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.

“Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.”

The word “count” means to “consider” or to think about the joy of being a follower of Christ. Peter wrote, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.” 1 Peter 4:12-14. Notice again what Peter said, “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye.”

I remember losing a temporary job for sharing Christ. As I thought about the incident, I was glad that I shared Jesus even though it cost me my job. I remember being treated different by church leaders because of my association with great reformers of our church, like Elder Ron Spear and Dr. Colin Standish. But I would never trade in those precious years to be better liked and treated by church leaders. I count it a true blessing to have worked with these reformers. Of course, these incidents are nothing compared to the persecution that the early Christians faced because of their expressed faith in Christ.

But as they “counted” the cost and thought about the trials they faced due to their faith in Jesus, they counted it all joy to know Jesus. If persecution, trial, and tribulation were the cost of following Jesus, they would gladly bear it to know Him and to share in His sufferings.

“Joy”

The term “joy” in this passage is a pure joy. No trial will diminish their faith, hope, and love for Jesus. They have embraced the promise “that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28.

Commonly associated with pure joy are things like trust, patience, understanding, assurance, and courage. If we did not trust Jesus would our joy be diminished? Certainly it would be. How about having patience and assurance in God’s promises? If we lacked in these things, would it affect our joy? I believe it would.

“When we fall in diver temptations”

This phrase is not referring to falling into sin. Certainly we are not to be joyful in sinning, rather we can rejoice in the varied challenges that test our faith. Some of these varied challenges can come in the form of having to defend the truth when her champions are few, or when we face other tests and trials.

Any and every challenge can make us better and not bitter. We can learn to become more loving, forgiving, understanding, and patience with each trial.

Verse 3

“Knowing”

If we remain faithful to God in our trials, we will experience spiritual growth. We will learn and “know” the truth that the trying of our faith develops patience.

“Faith”

It is not simply the trying and testing of our doctrines, but the trying of our faith and dependence upon Christ. When we are brought in various tests and trials it will show whether we are trusting in and leaning upon God for strength and guidance.

“Patience”

With each victory we become more steadfast, gaining confidence in Him who has called us to “live godly in this present world.” Titus 2:12

Learning to trust and wait upon the Lord is one of the greatest Christian virtues, and God will allow us to go through various tests and trials to learn trust, patience, and faith in Him.

Verse 4

We can see in this verse that patience is key to the perfection of character. In fact, “patience” or “perseverance” is key to remaining faithful in the great test ahead of us. As it describes God’s saints in the end of time, “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” Revelation 14:12.

We clearly need patience to keep the commandments perfectly. We need patience to exhibit the faith of Jesus. The “perfect work” of patience is to make us complete in Christ, whereby we are not lacking in any Christlike characteristic.

Verse 5

“If any of you”

No matter where you are in your Christian experience, you may ask of God and He will guide you. If you seek wisdom you will receive wisdom. Wisdom from above will enable us to understand the principles of God in a deeper and broader way. We will be better able to discern God’s will for our life.

“Let him ask”

However, to receive wisdom we must ask for wisdom. In addition, we must play our part in asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and then take the time to read and study truth with a willingness to obey.

“God, that giveth”

Wisdom indeed comes from God, who will guide and bless every searcher for truth. God is not only holy and living, but He is also very giving.

Verse 6

“In faith.”

When we ask for wisdom we must believe that God will grant our request. If we doubt God’s love and care, then we find ourselves upon a vast sea with tossing waves, not knowing where we will end up. But if you want clear direction, and if you want to be on that steady course that leads to eternal life, then you must trust that God will guide you and strengthen you.

Verse 7

“Not that man.”

The man who has no real faith in God is not mentally prepared to receive an answer to his prayers. The tragedy is that his doubt is all the more confirmed when he sees his request denied. But God in His mercy will do all that He can to help this faithless man to have faith. For to give a faithless man all that he asks is to make him all the more self-centered.

Verse 8

“Double minded”

Those who are “doubled minded” are trying to serve two masters. They know they should consecrate all to the Lord, but they still want to maintain some worldly features. A person that is “double minded” is not stable in his relationship with Christ. One day he trusts the Lord, the next day he doubts God’s love and protection.

If a man is unstable in his prayer life, not knowing whether to fully trust God or not, is a man that becomes unstable in other areas of his life. An unstable prayer life leads to an inconsistent life in other areas like—lifestyle choices, associations, his thoughts and feelings, and his devotional time.

Verse 9

“Of low degree”

The brother in “low degree” is someone who may be facing poverty and even a loss of his job. No doubt James knew members who lived in very humble situations with very little of this world’s goods. They may have even lost their jobs for taking a stand for truth. Such a situation may cause someone to doubt God’s love and protection.

However, if someone has faith in Christ even though he faces economic hardships, he is indeed very rich. I do not have much of this world’s good, but someone said to me the other day, “Jeff, you are very rich.” What did he mean? He meant that I was so blessed by having such a beautiful family that loves the Lord.

“Exalted”

We will be exalted when we are winged to heaven and find our home in the New Jerusalem. But we are highly exalted now in our connection with Christ. If we have in our hearts the love of Jesus and the faith of Jesus, we are of all people most blessed. It matters not how many things we acquire in this world. What matters is whether we have received the riches of Christ’s character in the life.

Verses 10, 11

“The rich”

In contrast to the economically poor brother, there is the “rich” brother.” Here the “rich” brother is to rejoice, not in his riches, but in his faith in Christ. There were those in the church who had great means. They were equally blessed in bearing reproach for Christ’s sake.

“In that he is made low”

We can praise God that the “rich” brother was also made low in receiving the humility of Christ. He could now see that his riches could help further the work of the gospel. Like Nicodemus, many who had means gave sacrificially to help the work move forward.

But as the flower fadeth so will our wealth. We need to make sure that we give sacrificially to help with the finishing of the work, so that our wealth does not fade away and become useless.

So let us be men and women of a strong prayer life whereby we trust fully in the Lord. May we seek that which is eternal that will never fade away. Whether we be poor or rich, let us continue to address one another as “brother” and love one another as Christ loves us. Let us do all that we can to further the work of God, whether that comes in the form of talents, time, or means.

Lesson 2: Enduring Tests

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Enduring Tests	Verses 12-18
Doers of the Word	Verses 19-27

Verse 12

“Blessed”

In verse 2, James used the phrase, “Count it all,” and in verse 9, he used the word, “rejoice.” When it comes to trials, most people do not put them in the category of rejoicing and being blessed. But James is trying to help us see trials in a different way. He is encouraging us to see trials as a path to blessings and rewards.

What kind of rewards could we expect from trials? Consider these words of Paul, saying, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy [to be compared] with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” Romans 8:18. “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” 2 Corinthians 4:17, 18

“endureth temptation”

This includes more than the temptation to sin. We are to steadfastly endure all afflictions, such as, sickness and poverty.

“for when he is tried”

This phrase means more than being tempted, rather, it means being approved. If the believer comes out victorious he shall receive the crown of life. He will receive life eternal.

“which the Lord has promised to them that love Him.”

It would seem from the context that we show our love to God by trusting in Him. If we do not trust Him to strengthen us through every trial, do we truly love Him. It seems evident, that trust and love are closely tied together.

Verse 13

“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God”

God would never put us through a trial for the purpose of failing. Satan, on the other hand, tempts us that we might fall into sin. But tragically our fallen conditions have a bent to blame others for our misfortunes, even to the point of blaming God. For example, after Adam and Eve sinned, Adam blamed God for creating Eve, and Eve blamed God for creating the serpent. But James 1:13 makes it very clear that God will not and cannot tempt man to do evil.

Verse 14

“lusts”

The word “lusts” could be translated also as “desires,” “longings,” and “cravings.” This would mean that we are tempted from within. Due to hereditary traits and cultivated tendencies, each person has cravings for that which is sinful. Our sinful natures have a bent toward sin. In addition, Satan tempts us from without. He takes special notice of our weaknesses and knows just what bait to put on the hook to lure us into sin.

“enticed”

This word means “to entice by bait.” Satan puts the bait on the hook to lure us into sin. The reason we take the bait is because of those sinful desires within our hearts. If the desire for sin was not there, then Satan’s temptation would not seem so alluring.

What can we do? It would seem evident that we must not only be forgiven of our sinful acts, but we must be cleansed of the desire to commit such sins. The apostle John wrote, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9

True confession includes (1) the forgiveness of sins, and (2) the cleansing from all unrighteousness. Jesus taught us that a bad tree cannot produce good fruit, and that a good tree cannot produce bad fruit. See Matthew 7:17-19.

We need to ask God to forgive us for the bad fruit we have produced. But we also need to ask God to cut down the bad tree that produced the bad fruit. It is one thing to ask forgiveness for speaking a harsh word, but we need to ask God to cut down the bad tree of an evil temper.

Verse 15

“Then when lust hath conceived”

When we give in to those sinful desires, sin is conceived. For example, what happens when an immoral thought comes to mind? Have I sinned because the immoral thought came to mind? No. It becomes sin when I dwell upon that immoral thought. When that immoral thought comes to mind we should immediately turn to God for strength that we might have such a thought removed from our thoughts. But if we give in to those immoral thoughts and choose to dwell upon them, then we have crossed the line and have sinned in our hearts.

“and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”

If I would continue to dwell upon immoral thoughts then it will not only destroy my character, but it will eternally separate me from God unless I repent and become converted.

Once sin is born in the life, it has a way of growing and maturing. This is why sin should not be trifled with. We may think that a particular sin is small and insignificant. But if we continue to give in it will grow and will likely lead us to commit other sins as well.

Verse 16

“Do not err”

Do not err in thinking that God is at fault for your failures and perplexities in life. All that is good comes from above. All that is evil comes from below. God is in the business to deliver you from sin. It is Satan that tempts you to sin.

Verse 17

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above”

“Every” good gift is from God, and He bestows these gifts to men who believe in Him and to those who believe Him not. For God sends the rain upon the good and the bad.

Every “good” gift is from God, who does not send “bad” gifts. All that God gives is for man’s good. There is not in any of God’s gifts the intent to cause harm.

Every good “gift” is just that, it is a “gift” from God. We have not earned God’s goodness. In fact, while we were yet His enemies, Christ died for us. See Romans 5:6-10

“Every perfect gift”

All of God’s gifts are perfect, there is no taint of evil or sin.

“cometh down from the Father of lights”

All these good gifts come from God the Father. As the sun brightens our day, so the Father brightens our life. He is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.

“no variableness, neither shadow of turning”

You can always count on God to deliver you from evil. Always! There is no variableness in God, He is always perfect in all His ways. The sun may be its brightest at noon, but fades in the sunset. But not so with God.

Verse 18

“Of His own will”

It was God’s will to create us, and it was His will that we would live forever in holiness. It was never God’s will that man should sin and die.

“begat He us with the word of truth”

But thanks be to God that we can be born again. Through the power of God’s Word we might be redeemed from our sinful natures, that we might even now in this present world live righteously and godly. See Titus 2:11-14

“that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures”

Even though we were born with sinful natures, and we are tempted from within and without, we can by the grace of God be “a kind of firstfruits.” In other words, we can be like Jesus.

How do we become like Christ? As we patiently endure every temptation and every trial by the power of the Holy Spirit, we will become more beautiful in Christ each day. Therefore, rejoice when you are tried for God has promised life to them that love Him. Amen.

Lesson 3: Doers of the Word

Structure of Chapter One

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Enduring Tests	Verses 12-18
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Verse 19

“Wherefore”

Based upon the established fact that all good things come from God (see verse 17), we should be eager to listen to more of God’s will, be patient with others, and not be hasty in our speech.

“Swift to hear”

If you believe that God will continue to give you “every good gift and every perfect gift” then you will want to be swift to hear all that God has to say. By so doing, we would be increasing our knowledge about our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Slow to speak”

It is part of good listening not to be so hasty in our speech. We should think before we speak. Make sure that your words are true, your thoughts clear, and your motive pure.

“He that hath knowledge spareth his words: *and* a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: *and* he that shutteth his lips *is esteemed* a man of understanding.” Proverbs 17:27, 28

“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.” Eccl 5:2

“Slow to wrath”

This phrase would include being winsome with others. Even if you disagree with someone, it need not cause a rift. As Paul wrote, “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” Romans 12:18

“A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but *he that is* slow to anger appeaseth strife.” Proverbs 15:18

“He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.” Proverbs 16:32

“Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul.” Proverbs 22:24, 25

“A stone *is* heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool’s wrath *is* heavier than them both. Wrath *is* cruel, and anger *is* outrageous; but who *is* able to stand before envy?” Proverbs 27:3, 4

Verse 20

If we share the truth in a condemning way, we are not making manifest the righteousness of God. The truth should always be shared in the love of Christ.

"You cannot reach hearts with a mere form of words, a parrot-like repetition of set phrases. What you say must be the expression of a personal experience. If you cheer hearts with words of courage and hope, it will be because the grace and love of God are to you a living reality. It is God's impress that these souls are to receive, not your own. But if the worker has not himself been refined, transformed, he cannot present the truth with a freshness, a force, a power, that awakens responsive feelings in those who hear the word of life.--RH April 12, 1892. Page 156, 157

"Duty, stern duty, has a twin sister, which is kindness. If duty and kindness are blended, decided advantage will be gained; but if duty is separated from kindness, if tender love is not mingled with duty, there will be a failure, and much harm will be the result. Men and women will not be driven, but many can be won by kindness and love. Brother S has held aloft the gospel whip, and his own words have frequently been the snap to that whip. This has not had an influence to spur others to greater zeal and to provoke them to good works, but it has aroused their combativeness to repel his severity." *Testimonies to the Church*, volume 3, 108

Verse 21

"Lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness"

We are to lay aside everything what is unlike Jesus. Strip off the clothes stained with sin and put on the righteousness of Christ.

"Superfluity of naughtiness" refers to an abundance of ill will or malice towards others. If we were swift to hear the truth, thought about how we could share the truth in love, then malice would cease. It is also true that if there were no ill will or malice in the heart, then we would do a better job of hearing God's Word and sharing the Word more effectually with others.

"Receive with meekness the engrafted word"

We need to receive both the humility and meekness of Christ along with the truths of God's Word. Meekness is such an important Christian virtue that enables the Word to be planted in the life and to bear the fruit of a Christlike character.

Verse 22

"Doers of the Word"

It is not enough to be "swift to hear." It is not enough to teach the truth with meekness. We must also be doers of the Word. It is not enough to read the truth, to teach the truth, or to belong to God's remnant church. The true test of the Christian is whether he is living by Word through the power of the Holy Spirit.

"Deceiving"

One of the greatest dangers for members of God's remnant church is that a mere intellectual ascent to truth is sufficient for salvation. Knowing which day is the Sabbath and knowing what happens to a man when he dies is not conversion. These are indeed precious truths. But every one of us must be born again if we are to see the kingdom of God. See John 3:3-8

Verses 23, 24

How many times have we heard a good sermon and then forgot what was said just a few hours later? We can read the Word and for a moment be strongly impressed. If we do not have a plan of action to keep the Word, we often forget what we just read. That is like a man looking into the mirror and sees a few smudges on his face and then walks away. After a time, he forgets about the blotches and walks around with dirt on his face.

The mirror that we need to be looking into is God's perfect law. God's law will never fail to show us our true condition. But we cannot just look at the law and then walk away. We must look into that perfect law with the intent to have the smudges washed away by the cleansing of the Word and the Holy Spirit. We do not want to be simply informed, but changed.

We might ask the question, “Why would we look into the mirror and walk away with smudges on our face?” It is because we have not fully consecrated ourselves to God. We are still holding back something that we know is not in agreement with His perfect will.

Verse 25

“Perfect law of liberty”

The first thing we want to acknowledge is that God’s law is perfect. It is a revelation of His altogether beautiful and perfect character. Second, obedience to God’s law by the power of the Holy Spirit brings liberty. It is sin that causes slavery, not obedience. The man who is a “doer of the work” or will of God is blessed by such a life. He is not simply blessed by the act of obedience, but the fellowship he has with God that enables him to be obedient.

Verse 26

If someone talks about religious things but has a bent to speak evil of others, who has an unbridled tongue, then he is not truly converted, and his religion is in vain. That might seem harsh to say, but if he were truly converted, then his words would be evidence of that fact.

James is warning us not to be deceived in believing that our intellectual understanding of truth is conclusive evidence of conversion. If we still have an unbridled tongue, our mere understanding of Bible doctrines will not save us.

Verse 27

“Pure religion”

There is a “pure religion.” Aspects of this pure religion are seen in our interest in those who need care and support like the fatherless, the widow, and the orphan. Here is expressed loving acts to those who cannot pay us back. It is a pure love with no selfish motives.

Pure religion includes being “unspotted from the world.” Here James is referring to the sinful thoughts and practices of the world. After all, if a church looks like and acts like the world, then that church’s religion is in vain. It is powerless. But thanks be to God that He is pure, undefiled, and all-powerful. Therefore, we are without excuse in being pure because He is pure and all-powerful.

Lesson 4: Respect for others

Structure of Chapter Two

Respect for Others	Verses 1-13
Faith Without Works is Dead	Verses 14-26

Verse 1

“My brethren”

If you were going to talk about “respect for others,” you would definitely begin by saying, “My brethren.” James does not see himself as better than others. This is very important. Why? Partiality in the church causes divisions amongst members.

We are the body of Christ and every part is important. If we were to give honor to any part of the body, we are told to give it to those that typically receive no honor at all. Paul wrote, “And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.” 1 Corinthians 12:23-25

The comely parts are the gifts of apostle, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Upon these we generally give the most praise. An uncomely part would be the gift of helps, where someone is willing to help clean the toilets, vacuum the carpet, and clean the church kitchen. Seldom to these individuals receive any honor. But for the sake of the church body, we are to give more honor to those who are generally overlooked. Tragically, we do just the opposite. We should know by now that the pastor already has his honor by virtue of his role. So why do we give the most honor and recognition to the comely gifts, the wealthiest, and the most educated?

If we show partiality to the rich, then we show that we do not have the same faith as our Lord Jesus Christ, nor do we show a deep and lasting faith in the Lord Jesus.

Verses 2, 3

“For if there come unto your assembly”

This opening statement in verse two seems to be pointing to those who visit the local church. Here James is painting a picture where two men come to the local church. One man wears a gold ring and expensive clothes. The other man wears the clothes of a poor man. So how do we treat these two visitors when they come to the local church? Do we give more attention and courtesy to the rich man than to the poor man? Apparently this was a real problem in the early church. The rich man was favored above the poor man.

Verse 4

“Judges of evil thoughts”

Those who favor someone over another because of his wealth is a judge of evil thoughts. He has simply placed more value upon the rich man than the poor man. But Calvary teaches us differently. Christ died for all, equally. When calling His disciples, Jesus did not base His selection upon socio-economic factors. Rather, he chose those men that he believed would be teachable and faithful to truth and righteousness.

By giving preference to the rich man, the church member gave evidence that he thought just as the world thinks. It is simply wrong to think that a man has more worth than others because he has more money. Furthermore, character is not determined by bank accounts and deeds to property. Character is determined by one's relationship to Christ and His law.

Verse 5

Jesus has not called anyone because he is poor. Rather, those that are “the poor of this world,” are those that do not seek after the things of this world. They are not gathering for themselves treasures on earth, but treasures in heaven. It may be true that they are living near or below the poverty line. But what makes them rich is their faith in Christ.

If we are poor to the things of this world and are rich in faith, then we truly have more than the richest men on earth. We are more than billionaires. If you are an heir of the kingdom, then after you have lived a billion years, you have only just begun to live.

James is also here saying that the majority of those that are in fact following Christ are those that do not have much of this world's wealth. Generally speaking, those that are rich put more faith in their wealth than in God.

Verse 6

The early Christians were heavily persecuted. James reminds the church members that the wealthier classes were the ones who influenced the state and the Sanhedrin to persecute the church. So why are you showing preference to the very class that takes the lead in persecuting you?

Of course, James is not suggesting that they should hate rich people. Rather, they should treat all men as they would want to be treated. This is the golden rule. Matthew 7:12.

Verse 7

Not only did many unbelieving rich men oppress these early believers, but they also blasphemed the name of Christ. Therefore, why show partiality to someone because he is rich, do you not know that it is often the rich that oppress you and blaspheme the name of Jesus?

In the time of Daniel, the leading political, military, and business leaders threw their support for the golden image in Daniel chapter three. They were of course wrong. But because they were leaders, they misled the common man. As such, great persecution came to the believers of the one true God.

In these last days, Satan will sway the masses by misleading the politically powerful, the captains of industry, and the religious leaders of our day to pass a law against the law of God. In so doing, they will simultaneously be oppressing God's people and blaspheming the name of Christ. Therefore, why would you show more preference to someone because of his money and position in life?

Verse 8

"Royal Law"

If you want to speak about riches and royalty, let us talk about the "royal law." The royal law is the law of the King of glory, and His law teaches us to love all men, even our enemies.

The law of the world is to love the rich as yourself. But Jesus teaches us to love your neighbor as yourself.

Verse 9

But if we show partiality, it testifies that God's law, the royal law, is not written upon our hearts and mind.

Verses 10, 11

A man need not break every civil law to go to jail. He only needs to break one civil law to find himself in prison. If he murders someone, he will go to prison, even if he never stole or committed perjury.

In like manner, we show that self is still in control when we break even one of God's commandments. If we lie, then we are as guilty in God's eye as if we broke all His commandments.

What binds all the commandments together is love. If we break even one commandment we show that love is not the guiding principle of our life.

Verse 12

Choose to live according to all of God's precepts and you will not show partiality toward any man, whether he is rich or poor. The man who loves God's law and loves his neighbor as himself is truly free.

Verse 13

To show favoritism to the rich is to be judgmental and merciless to the poor. If you show no mercy, then you will not receive mercy. But if you are merciful you will obtain mercy.

Lesson 5: Faith Without Works is Dead

Structure of Chapter Two

Respect for Others

Verses 1-13

Faith Without Works is Dead

Verses 14-26

Verse 14

"What doth it profit...?"

What does it profit a man in terms of eternity to say he has faith, but his life lacks the evidence of a pure religion? Can a man be saved who has only an intellectual ascent to truth but does not show the fruit of the Spirit? The answer is "No!"

Verses 15, 16

Let us take for example a brother that lacks sufficient clothing. He comes to you for help and your church is able to supply his need. But instead of helping him you send him on his way and tell him that God will supply his need. Is this kind of faith worth anything? The answer is "No!" Faith without works is neither beneficial to the believer, nor is it beneficial to those who are hurting and in need of help.

Verse 17

A person may have faith in all the right doctrines but if his Christian experience is only intellectual in nature, then his faith is dead. For faith to be alive it must be accompanied by the works of the Spirit.

Verse 18

Some teach that they are saved by faith alone. Actually we are saved by grace through faith. As Paul wrote, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." Ephesians 2:8

The grace of God is the power of God. Through the power of God we are able to do all that God asks. God calls us to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth. This can only be accomplished by ministering unto the needs of others by the love of Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit. If we choose not to shine and we lose our saltiness, then our faith is good for nothing.

So we are not saved by either faith or works, but by grace through faith. Nobody is going say in heaven that they are there because of their faith, nor will some say that they are there because of their works. We will all say that we are in heaven because of the grace of God.

Even so, James is making a very important point. A man may say that he is saved by his faith, but if he lacks good works, then he shows that he truly does not have faith in the power of God. But the man who demonstrates every day that God is working through him to make a positive difference in the lives of others, is truly the man who has faith in the power of God.

Verse 19

It is a blessing to have a correct understanding of the one true God. However, the devils are also very aware that there is the one true God, and they tremble at the thought of standing before him in the judgment. Why? They tremble because they have knowingly rebelled against God and have failed to repent. How about us? We will stand before the judgment seat of a loving God, but have we confessed our sins while we still have time?

Verse 20

Do you really want to know what constitutes a true and saving faith? It is this, that your faith must be accompanied by works. You are not saved by faith and works. Rather, your works demonstrate that you have a living faith.

Verse 21

Abraham believed that through his miracle son, Isaac, that he would be the father of a great nation. When God asked Abraham to offer his son Isaac, he still believed that through Isaac he would be the father of a great nation. Every stick that he picked up for the altar was an act of faith through works. Binding the hands of Isaac was works of faith that demonstrated Abraham's faith is God's promise and power. Hence, Abraham demonstrated his faith in God through his works of faith.

Verse 22

Can you see how faith and works go together? If we continue to live by faith, following in the footsteps of Jesus, we will see the perfecting of our faith.

Verse 23

Before he had a son, Abraham believed in God's promise of having a son. By offering Isaac according to God's command, his faith was not lessened, but perfected. This act of faith was credited to Abraham's account in heaven. His trust in God and his obedience to God's commands made him the friend of God.

Verse 24

When we first come to Christ by faith we are justified. We are forgiven of our sins and stand justified before God as if we had never sinned. But to remain justified, a man must now live by faith. It is his faith in the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit that a man must now live the transformed life of good works that glorify God in all things.

The born again person has become a new creation; the repentant sinner now has a new heart. And the evidence of a new heart is a changed life. It is a new life in Christ that is made manifest in a life of loving service and obedience to God's will.

Verse 25

Rahab was not a Hebrew, nor a life-long servant of God like Abraham. In fact, she was a harlot. But she had heard of the one true God, and the Holy Spirit worked upon her heart and led her to believe in the God of heaven and earth. She had a golden moment to demonstrate her faith in God by helping the Hebrew spies to escape. What did she do? She helped the servants of the one true God, because she truly believed in the God of Israel.

Verse 26

Works are to faith as breathe is to the body. If the breathe is gone the body dies. So it is with faith. If there are no works of faith, then faith will die.

Lesson 6

Structure of Chapter Two

Respect for Others

Verses 1-13

Faith Without Works is Dead

Verses 14-26

Our focus in this lesson will again be on the subject of faith.

Section One: Great Faith

Upon what did the centurion depend for the healing of his servant?

“And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, 8:6 And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. 8:7 And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. 8:8 The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. 8:9 For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this [man], Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. 8:10 When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.” Matthew 8:5-10

Jesus commended this centurion for having great faith, because he had depended upon the Word alone.

Therefore, faith is expecting the Word of God to do what it says, and depending upon that Word to do what it says.

Hence, “the just shall live by faith,” because they are living by the Word of God. Romans 1:17

When we choose not to live by the Word we are no longer living by faith, and “whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” Romans 14:23

How powerful is God’s Word?

“By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. 33:7 He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: he layeth up the depth in storehouses. 33:8 Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. 33:9 For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.” Psalm 33:6-9

How long after God spoke, did the thing appear? Before He spoke it was not. After He spoke “it was.” What caused it to be? The Word only! Did it appear as soon as He spoke? Yes, it appear immediately!

“And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth [his] hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean. 1:42 And as soon as he had spoken, **immediately** the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.” Mark 1:41, 42

There is life and power in God’s Word, as Jesus said, “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” John 6:63

How much faith must we have in God’s Word?

So long as we see ourselves as reasonably good and rest upon our own righteousness, there can be no faith.

We are to have faith in God alone, in His Word alone, and in His power alone.

How much faith do you need in yourself to be justified or forgiveness for your sins? None!

How much faith do you need to believe in His promise to forgive? One hundred percent!

FOR-GIVE-NESS

To forgive is to give for. As we give our sins to Christ, He gives us something for those sins. There is only one thing that God will give for sin and that is righteousness. Hence, when we are forgiven we become a new creature or new creation.

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. 3:2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. 3:3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. 3:4 When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. 3:5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: 3:6 For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: 3:7 In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. 3:8 But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. 3:9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; 3:10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:" Colossians 3:1-10

As we can see from the previous passage, we have to have a faith that works. We are not saved by our works, but by grace through faith. Consider these words of Paul:

"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." Galatians 5:6

We can see that a living "faith" is motivated by "love." A faith motivated by love will work the works of righteousness. But also notice in this passage that "works" which are not motivated by love are nothing. And "uncircumcision," or the lack of works is nothing.

Paul is clear that faith without works is dead. See James 2:14. Therefore, the absence of works shows the absence of faith. Paul speaks of some who profess to know God, but deny Him by their lack of works, saying, "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate." Titus 1:16

Section Two: The Faith of Jesus

"Here is the patience of the saints: here [are] they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." Revelation 14:12

In these words we have a description of God's last-day church. But we also have an appeal from God, saying, "I need a people who keep the commandments, and have the same faith as My dear Son."

Never before in the history of our world have these two items been most needed. The world is waxing worse and worse, and the world needs a demonstration of the "faith of Jesus."

If we had the faith of Jesus we would live like Jesus. So if we believe or practice anything that Jesus did not believe or practice, then we should be willing to give those things up.

Like Pilate, many have asked, "What is truth?" The answer is, Jesus "is the truth." John 14:6

Jesus is the answer to what we must believe and how we must behave, for He is the "way, the truth, and the life." John 14:6

Jesus said, "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." John 13:15

Now suppose you have some questions about Bible doctrines, where should you search first for an answer? You should look to the words of Jesus.

So many professed Christians based their faith on some church creed. The thought that we are to believe what Jesus believed is a new thought to many Christians.

Think of how much error has been taught by the churches for centuries. Some teach salvation by works. Many teach the erroneous doctrine of the immortality of the soul. The vast majority of Christians worship on a different day than Jesus did. There is so many things in the churches that are unlike Jesus. And it is not just in the area of doctrine, but also in behavior. So can we say that Christianity as a whole has the "faith of Jesus"? Obviously not!

The fourteenth chapter of Revelation presents a people who "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth," who "are without fault before the throne of God," and who have the "Father's name written in their foreheads." See Revelation 14:1-5.

They would certainly be included as those that "keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus."

Not only do they have faith in Jesus, but they have the faith taught by Jesus. They believe in Jesus, they have the same faith as Jesus, and teach the same faith that Jesus taught.

If all Christians had this kind of faith, then there would "be one fold, and one Shepherd." John 10:16.

While God has His true and faithful in all the churches, the call will sound, "Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." Revelation 18:4.

Millions will heed the call. They will "hear His voice," and will follow Christ "whithersoever He goeth." What unites God people in the end of time is the "faith of Jesus."

As the Holy Spirit leads them, they will follow the example of Jesus and do what He did. They will believe what He taught. In this way, Jesus becomes their Alpha and Omega, and the beginning and end.

What did Jesus believe about the Word?

"The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God. 10:34 Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? 10:35 If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken;" John 10:34-36.

The word translated as “broken,” means to unloose or undo. In other words, the Word cannot be explained away, it cannot be made to mean nothing—its binding claims cannot be diminished.

This same Jesus that believed that the Word cannot be broken, also had the Word in His heart and on His tongue. He was ever ready to say, “It is written.”

When Jesus was tempted of the devil in the wilderness, He would answer, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” Matthew 4:4.

Jesus believed in the Word and He used the Word.

A rich young ruler came to Jesus, saying, “Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “What is written in the law? How readeth thou?” See Luke 10:25-28.

At other times Jesus gently rebuked His hearers for not knowing the Word, saying, “Have you not read what David did?...have ye not read in the law...Have ye not read in the book of Moses?...Have ye not read so much as this?” Matthew 12:3, 5; Mark 12:26; Luke 6:3.

Now if the Jews had believed all that Moses was inspired to write—they would have accepted Jesus as the Messiah. See John 5:45-47.

The Word is an invitation to think as God thinks, for the Word is a reflection of His thoughts. Jesus is the Father’s thoughts made visible, for the Word was made flesh. See John 1:14.

Light is Progressive

As we study the Word we will begin to think and feel as God does. For “truth is an advancing truth.” *Counsel to Writers and Editors*, 33.

As we receive new light it will lead us “onward and upward to purity and holiness.” *Testimonies to the Church*, volume 5, 534.

“It is our privilege to reach higher and still higher for clearer revealings of the character of God.” *Ministry of Healing*, 464

“One interest will prevail, one subject will swallow up every other—Christ our Righteousness.” *Sons and Daughters of God*, 259

How do I know if I have received the truth?

“The most convincing testimony that we can bear to others that we have the truth is the spirit which attends our advocacy of that truth. If it sanctifies the heart of the receiver, if it makes him gentle, kind, forbearing, true and Christlike, then he will give some evidence of the fact that he has the genuine truth. But if he acts as did the Jews when their opinions and ideas were crossed, then we certainly cannot receive such testimony, for it does not produce the fruits of righteousness.” 1888 Materials 2:632.

Lesson 7: Control the Tongue

James 3:1-12: Control the Tongue

The subject of speech is not a new thought when we come to the third chapter of James. In chapter one, we read:

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” James 1:19

“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.” James 1:26

“So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.” James 2:12

Now James continues to instruct us that a pure religion will exemplify a life without hasty and unsanctified speech.

Verse 1: “be not many masters”

The word for “masters” is the same word for “teachers.” So the verse is saying, “be not many teachers.”

It is the Holy Spirit that distributes the gifts according to His will. See 1 Corinthians 12:11. The gift of teaching is one of these gifts of the Spirit. See Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 12:28. Those who teach are accountable for what they teach and the influence they have upon others. The greater the gift and responsibility, the greater the accountability. Therefore, a teacher who is heard by many must be all the more careful about what he says.

Verse 2: “the same is a perfect man”

All of us have made mistakes and have said things we wish we had never said. But through the power of the Holy Spirit, a man need not offend in word. Such a man demonstrates that the heart is pure when his words are pure. However, if we are careless in speech it demonstrates that there are thoughts that are not in agreement with Jesus.

Verse 3: “we put bits in the horses’ mouths”

In the same way that a wild horse endangers the rider, so an unbridled tongue endangers the soul of the man who possesses it.

To ride a wild horse we must tame it and control its movements with a small bit. With this small bit in the horse's mouth, this large and spirited animal is under control.

The wild and unconverted heart of man must be changed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Even after he is converted, he must guard his speech that he might not defile himself and run wild again. Words have so much influence upon us and others. With the same small mouth we may praise God or curse Him. We may speak words of encouragement or discouragement. We may talk faith or doubt. It is a small part of our physical being, but it controls so much of the path that we travel.

Verse 4: “whithersoever the governor listeth”

Ships are much bigger than horses, but are still controlled and guided by that which is small. For the horse it is the bit, and for the ship it is the small rudder. But a ship cannot think like a horse. It is the “governor” that steers the rudder that directs the ship. Even in fierce winds, the ship may safely make it to the harbor.

In the case of the ship, a decision has to be made. Will the “governor” steer the ship to the left or the right? In the same way, we will choose to speak words that destroy or give life? In either case, a choice must be made. So when

it comes to speech we do have a choice. The choice to speak pure words is ours, but the power to speak pure words belongs to God.

Verse 5: “boasts great things”

Words may be spoken that will lead a precious soul to Christ. Prayers may be offered that will lead to a great revival. Are there any limits to the wonderful things that can be said and should be said? Is it possible to see a great revival amongst us? Can such a revival begin with a few pure words in your family and local church?

Verse 6: “setteth on fire the course of nature”

Yet, with this same tongue we may set in motion a thousand evils. The spark that burns and destroys a forest of only a few acres, can as easily burn and destroy a forest made up of millions of acres. It is best never to set in motion any evil by our words. Rather, we are to set in motion a thousand kindnesses by our selfless service to others.

But many “great things” have not happened because of evil speech. Some churches have split over careless words. Millions no longer attend our churches because of ill-chosen words.

Verse 7: “hath been tamed by man”

Mankind was given charge over the things of this world. We were to care for and tame the animals both large and small. Consider how wonderfully man has tamed every kind of beast, the birds, serpents, and sea creatures. Perhaps you have witnessed the taming of lions, elephants, killer whales, and birds of prey.

Verse 8: “But the tongue no man can tame”

What is harder, to tame a lion or the tongue? We would likely say, “I do not think I could tame a lion.” However, without the aid of the Holy Spirit, it is much harder to tame the tongue than the lion. In fact, without the Holy Spirit, the tongue becomes an “unruly evil, full of deadly poison.”

Think about it! What started the Civil War, WW I, WW II, and all the other wars that have destroyed millions of lives? It is the tongue which represents the evil in man’s heart. What is the solution? It is the gospel.

Verse 9: “bless God....and therewith curse we men”

What a tragic testimony of what happens all too often in the house of God. We outwardly express our faith and gratitude to God, and then with the same mouth we curse our fellow man, if not, even our fellow believer.

Same mouth, but double-minded!

Verse 10: “these things ought not to be so”

With the same mouth come blessings and curses. But it does not need to be so. Through the work of the Holy Spirit the heart is changed. With the new heart the thoughts are changed. With new thoughts come new words.

Verse 11: “sweet....and bitter?”

When you draw water from a well, it will not come out both sweet and bitter. It is either clear or it is dirty, but it cannot be both. Therefore we must concern ourselves with the source of our words. Do we speak from an unconverted heart? Or, are we born-again? Are we renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit? Have we accepted Jesus as both our sacrifice for sin and our example for all holy living?

If the heart is pure the words will be pure.

Verse 12: “no fountain can yield salt water and fresh”

We are still in this old world because we have been satisfied with simply asking for the forgiveness of sins without asking to be cleansed from sin. We have been satisfied with asking God to forgive us for producing olives when we were to produce figs. We have asked God to forgive us for our salty water ways, but have not asked God to rid of the source of that salty water.

The Bible says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9

Did you catch that? If we confess our sins, then God will both “forgive us of our sins” and “cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” What a wonderful promise! It is God’s part to forgive and cleanse. It is our part to confess our sins.

But what does it mean to confess our sins?

First, there needs to be an acknowledgement of sin. If we do not acknowledge that we have done wrong, then there will be no true confession of sin. Second, with a humble heart we are to confess our sins to God. Never are we to confess our sins in a flippant or irreverent way. We are asking pardon from the Creator of heaven and earth. Third, we are to confess our sins with heartfelt repentance, regretting that we had committed them. If we are not truly repentant, have we truly confessed them? The psalmist wrote, “The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.” Psalm 34:18. And lastly, confession should be specific, acknowledging the very sins we have committed.

Does God want to forgive me of my sins?

The Bible says that God “is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance....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.” 2 Peter 3:9; John 3:16.

Does God really want me to be cleansed?

The Bible says, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish....This is the will of God, even your sanctification.” Ephesians 5:25-27; 1 Thessalonians 4:3.

Jesus “gave Himself” for us that we might be cleansed “by the word.” He wants to present us to His Father as a “glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” The “will of God” is our “sanctification.” The word “sanctification” means to make holy. Clearly, God wants to do more than forgive us of our past sins, He also wants to cleanse us from those sins.

But what if I confess my sins and I keep on committing the same sins?

This is the experience of many. Does this mean that there is something wrong with God and His promise? Absolutely not! The problem must lie with my confession. Would you agree?

Is it possible for a person to want to be forgiven but not changed? Certainly! A person may want to be forgiven for their angry words hurled at another person, but they still choose to hold ugly feelings towards that individual. A

person may want to be forgiven for adultery or fornication, but he still wants to hang on to immoral thoughts and practices.

It would seem evident that there is a true confession of sin that leads to both forgiveness and cleansing, and there is a confession of sin that leaves us unchanged. Obviously this is a very serious topic. We do not want to lose out on heaven because we have a mistaken concept of confession of sin.

What does it mean to be cleansed?

Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3:3. Is being "born again" more than being forgiven for past sins?

What does it mean to be "born again"?

The Bible says, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new....But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." 2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 3:8-10.

The new birth experience is the beginning of a new life in Christ. In this new life we "put away" the old life of anger, jealousy, and crude jesting. After all, we are more than "forgiven," we are to be "cleansed."

If I have confessed my sins, why do I still struggle and fall into sin?

In answering this question, I would like us to look at a few verses in the book of Romans chapter seven, which reads, "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....O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Romans 7:18, 19, 24.

What a terrible struggle! Here Paul is describing the experience of someone who has confessed his sins, but who has not experienced the cleansing power that God has promised. This unconverted man knows what is right, he even wants to do what is right, but he does not know how. In the following verses, we find that he acknowledges that God's law is holy, but that he is carnal, sold under sin. "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good....For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin." Romans 7:12, 14.

It is true that God's ten moral precepts are holy, just, and good. The problem is not with God's Ten Commandments, the problem is with us. We were born with a carnal or fallen nature with the inclination to sin. It is like we were born into the bondage to sin, or "sold under sin." But there is hope. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9. If God can cleanse us of all unrighteousness, then the cleansing power of God must be more powerful than the sinful nature we were born with.

So what is the problem?

For most professed Christians, they have only confessed the sins they have committed. But let us ask ourselves another question, "Why did we commit those sins?" We committed them because *we are* sinful. The problem is with our sinful nature.

Jesus said, "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." Matthew 7:17-19.

In these words of Jesus, we see that the problem is not the bad fruit, but the bad tree. We can continue to ask God to forgive us of our bad fruit, but what do we really need to do? We need to ask God to forgive us and cleanse us from the evil inside of us.

I can ask God to forgive me for my angry words toward someone, but at some point I need to ask God to forgive me for the evil and hateful spirit that is in me. Not only do I need to ask God to forgive me for my angry spirit, I need to ask Him to cleanse me of that evil spirit. Only when I am cleansed of that evil spirit can I keep from producing the bad fruit.

More than this, not only do I need to be cleansed of that evil spirit, but I need the spirit of Christ in my life that I might speak words that are kind, courteous, and uplifting.

Here is how true confession works:

1. I confess that I have spoken words that were unkind, and I ask God to forgive me.
2. I then ask God to cleanse me of the evil inside of me that caused me to speak evil words.
3. I then ask God to share with me the kind, courteous, and uplifting words of Jesus.

I remember the time when someone broke into my home and stole three hundred dollars. My neighbor had seen this individual come into my home for a short time and then left. When I got home, my neighbor shared with me what had happened. I knew the man that came into my home uninvited. I also knew that he was capable of stealing my money, so I went to see if my three hundred dollars was still there. Guess what? It was gone!

I knew that this man had stolen my money. But I also noticed that I had some ugly feelings towards this man. I knew that my feelings were wrong, so I prayed that God would forgive me for my ill-feelings. But then, God impressed me that I needed more than forgiveness for my ill-feelings, I needed cleansing.

There was something inside of me that caused the ill-feelings. So I prayed, "Father, please forgive me for my ill-feelings towards this man. I do not love him. I wasn't even born with this kind of love. But I know that You love him, and I want to be born-again with Your love in my heart for this man. Thank you Father, for forgiving me and cleansing me of the evil within me and for sharing with me your altogether beautiful character. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen."

When I felt I had been forgiven and cleansed, then I went to this man's home with the love of Jesus in my heart. I knocked at his door and he opened the door. The first thing I said was, "I know that you took my three hundred dollars. But I want you to know that I forgive you. And I want you to know that you are worth a lot more than three hundred dollars."

The Holy Spirit had not only worked on my heart, but on his heart as well. We began to study the Bible together, and he accepted Jesus as His Lord and Savior.

Now if I had only asked to be forgiven for my ill-feelings, would I have gone to his home with the love of Jesus? No. The evil inside of me that caused the ill-feelings would have been still in me. What I needed was to be cleansed of that sinful nature that caused the sinful feelings. More than this, I needed to ask God to give me the love of Jesus for this man.

This is the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are not only forgiven but changed. This change begins when we give our sins to Christ. As Peter proclaimed, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Acts 2:38.

When we give our sins to Christ it is His glory to take them. In return He gives us the Holy Spirit to live the new life. As we daily walk in the power of the Holy Spirit we are being cleansed from all unrighteousness. This is what true confession is all about.

This earnest desire to be both forgiven and cleansed is what led the psalmist to write, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Psalm 139:23, 24. This must be our prayer, that God would search our hearts and reveal any wickedness that remains in us.

In His mercy, God will allow certain tests and trials to come our way that we might see things about ourselves that we have not seen. This must take place because we cannot confess sins that we are still ignorant of. So we pray, “O God, show me where I still fall short of Thy glory. Reveal to me where I am still unlike your altogether beautiful Son.” The Holy Spirit will not show us all our faults at once, but will with each conviction of sin impress us that we can be both forgiven and cleansed.

We should have no fear of allowing the Holy Spirit to convince of sin in our life. No matter what we have done, and no matter how many times we have done it, God will forgive us and cleanse us. What we should fear is our lack of desire to be cleansed of sin.

If the Holy Spirit reveals some new sin in my life, then does that mean that I have never been converted?

If the Holy Spirit has revealed to us a sin that we were not aware of before, then it tells us that God is proceeding with His glorious work of cleansing us from all unrighteousness. But when the Holy Spirit does reveal that wickedness in us, we do need to make a choice. The choice will always be ours. God will never force us to obey. He gives us the power of choice. While the power to overcome sin belongs to God, the choice will always be ours.

We see this lesson taught when Jesus healed the man who had been a paralytic for thirty-eight years. Jesus said to the paralytic, “Wilt thou be made whole?” The impotent man answered Him, ‘Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.’ Jesus saith unto him, ‘Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.’ And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.” John 5:6-9.

As soon as the man obeyed the words of Jesus he was healed. He did not say to Jesus, “Heal me first and then I will get up.” Oh no, he believed the words of Jesus, and as he rose he was healed.

How can I discover my hidden sins that I might be both forgiven and cleansed?

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.” Psalm 119:9-11

In this Bible text, we see that we are to take heed to God’s Word and with our whole heart seek after God. If we allow the Word to be hid in our hearts, then will we not wander from His commandments.

The apostle Paul would have us focus on the precious promises of God to experience the cleansing power of His Word, saying, “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” 2 Corinthians 7:1

When we study the Bible, we must mesh our study with this prayer of the psalmist, saying, “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.” Psalm 51:2

As we read earlier, Paul tells us that “Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” Ephesians 5:25-27.

I would encourage everyone to read through the Bible. Take it one verse at a time and own each verse. In other words, take the time to understand what you are reading, that you might receive the rich blessing that God has for you in that verse.

Lesson 8: The Humility of Heavenly Wisdom

James 3:13-4:10

Verse 13

“the....meekness of wisdom”

The man with true wisdom is not simply a man with facts and figures. His good “conversation” or good manner of living is made manifest in his words and deeds.

“Meekness of wisdom” is humility in action. We do not use information to show any superiority, but rather we use it to benefit others and to glorify God in all that we say and do.

Verse 14

“lie not against the truth”

Even if we preach and teach the truth, the bitter strife and envy among us shows that we have not been converted by the truth. So how can a church be content when there are divisions due to self-centeredness and jealousy? The solution would be to receive the “meekness of wisdom” that is found in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Verse 15

“This wisdom...is earthly, sensual, devilish”

There are two kinds of wisdom. There is a wisdom that comes from above, whereby we direct others to the Author of love and truth. And there is that earthly wisdom that focuses on self and the things of this fallen world. You might say that those who are content with an earthly wisdom already have their reward.

Daniel was given wisdom from above and took no credit for himself, but turned his hearers to the God of heaven and earth. He looked not for his reward in this world, but in the world to come. So it is with those who have wisdom from above.

Earthly wisdom is devilish because it was born of the devil himself. In heaven Lucifer became envious of Jesus and caused strife among the angels. His self-centeredness caused the war in heaven. He who was created perfect became imperfect by choosing to exalt self. By casting away the “meekness of wisdom” he defiled his mind and became Satan, the adversary.

Verse 16

“there is confusion”

Anywhere that you find self-centeredness you will find confusion and division. Jealousy between siblings brings disorder, as well as jealousy between husband and wife. In the church itself, strife and envy bear the fruits of evil surmising and gossip. If all possessed the heavenly gift of “meekness of wisdom” there would be peace and harmony in the home and church.

Verse 17

“is first pure”

True heaven-sent wisdom is first of all pure. It is the perfect blend of truth and pure motive. Such a pure wisdom will never be afraid or ashamed to present the truth tactfully and in love. Pure wisdom is not afraid of being tried and tested. It is not afraid of rejection. It seeks peace but without compromise. It is gentle by accepting people where they are without excusing sin and error. This wisdom is easy to be entreated by being winsome and approachable, we might even say, safe. People will feel comfortable sharing their thoughts with us even if we disagree. True wisdom is merciful and full of good fruits. We will serve our fellowman without partiality as Jesus died for all. And we shall do so without hypocrisy, whereby our deeds match our words.

Verse 18

“fruit of righteousness”

Those who sow strife will reap the results of strife. Those who bear the fruits of righteousness are truly the peacemakers that show that they are the children of God. Those who reject the truth are truly the enemies of peace. Truth unites. Error divides. As the children of God we are to live peaceable with all men, without compromise.

Chapter Four, Verse 1

“From whence come wars...?”

Untamed tongues, a contentious spirit, and envy are truly the cause of wars and fightings among God’s people.

Verse 2

“yet ye have not”

Does God want us to be happy? Yes. Can we obtain this happiness through self-centeredness? No. Can we obtain this happiness by being contentious and envious? No. Can we obtain this happiness through prayer? Yes. Many try to obtain happiness by gaining positions and possessions. But true happiness first comes from above. If it comes from above then we must receive it. But to have more of it, we must share it. This is the great law of life, we are to receive that we might give.

Verse 3

“ye ask amiss”

If I pray for wisdom, will I receive it? It depends on the motive for receiving it. If I desire wisdom to draw attention to myself, then I am asking amiss and will not receive. However, if I pray for wisdom to serve my fellowman, then I shall receive. We must not only pray for the right thing, we must do so with the right motive.

Verse 4

“enmity with God?”

If we chose to speak with an untamed tongue, if we continue to feed envy and jealousy, then we show that we belong to the world and not to Christ. If we chose to act like the world and revolve our life around the things of this world then we are working against God. James is speaking to church members, as he says, “know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?” In other words, those hearing this word should know better.

Verse 5

“saith in vain...?”

None of the words or promises of God are empty; they stand fast forever. God’s love for man is pure and everlasting. Though man may lust after the world, God has a caring jealousy for us. The Spirit yearns to draw us closer and closer to our heavenly Father.

Verse 6

“more grace”

We can never exhaust the grace of God, there is always more. God will bestow His grace upon the humble, but the proud are without. The proud even look down upon the very ones who are the recipients of God’s grace.

Verse 7

“Resist the devil”

If we would find victory over jealousy and an untamed tongue, then we must submit ourselves to God as the first work in the morning. Secondly, we must resist or take our stand against the devil. We must be willing to engage in this battle against our sinful nature and the instigator of sin. If we do, he shall flee from us because the Spirit is in us.

Verse 8

“draw nigh to God”

While God is near us and we have an abiding angel, we are to draw nigh to God. We are to open our heart to God and ask Him to cleanse it. We are to give our mind to God and ask Him to ennoble it. We are to dedicate our talents to God and ask Him to anoint them for service. All of who we are, and all of what we have, are to be surrendered to God. In this way, we are drawing nigh unto God. But if we chose to act independent of God we will be overcome by the devil.

Verse 9

“Be afflicted”

Allow the gift of godly sorrow to do her perfect work. May we be truly repentant of our evil deeds that we may choose to give them to Jesus, the Sin-bearer. It is His glory to take them and to forgive us. Then a sweet peace and joy will fill the soul. In this new heart of peace, laughter, and joy there is no more hatred, envy, and strife.

Verse 10

“humble yourselves”

While we cannot make ourselves meek, we can receive the humility of Jesus. If we ask for it, we shall receive it. Therefore, let us each day receive both the humility of Jesus and the faith of Jesus that we may be men and women who possess the “meekness of wisdom.”

Lesson 9: One Lawgiver and Judge

James 4:11-17

Verse 11

“Speak not evil one of another”

The failure of controlling the tongue (3:1-12), the lack of true wisdom (vs 3:13-18), and the love of the world (4:1-10), leads church members to speak evil of one another.

“he that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law”

When we speak evil of our brother we are in fact judging him. To judge him so severely and critically is to misrepresent the spirit of the law. By misrepresenting the spirit of the law we are in fact judging the law. We are

saying that the law does not condemn my critical spirit. We act as if the law condemns the speck in my brothers eye, but not the beam in my own eye.

“When the mind dwells upon self, it is turned away from Christ, the source of strength and life. Hence it is Satan's constant effort to keep the attention diverted from the Saviour and thus prevent the union and communion of the soul with Christ. **The pleasures of the world, life's cares and perplexities and sorrows, the faults of others, or your own faults and imperfections--to any or all of these he will seek to divert the mind.** Do not be misled by his devices. Many who are really conscientious, and who desire to live for God, he too often leads to dwell upon their own faults and weaknesses, and thus by separating them from Christ he hopes to gain the victory.” *Steps to Christ*, 71, 71.

There are four things the devil will try to get you to behold, so that you will not take the time to behold Christ. He will try and get you to behold the “pleasures of the world” so that you will become worldly. In such a state your love for worldly things will crowd out your love for Jesus and heavenly things. Second, Satan wants you to think about “life's care and perplexities and sorrow.” He wants you to keep remembering where you have failed so that you will never choose to do great things for God. He wants you to be paralyzed by your past and present difficulties. Third, the adversary wants you to behold the “faults of others.” He wants you to be critical and judgmental towards your fellowman and fellow church member. He wants the church to be divided and lifeless, which a group of critical people will certainly achieve. And lastly, Satan wants you to behold your own faults and imperfections. He is very aware of the law that says, “You cannot rise any higher than your highest thought.” If your highest thoughts are of your own imperfections, then you cannot raise any higher than that. We should be contemplating the perfection of Christ and know that He lived such a beautiful life for us. Through the Holy Spirit, the life of Christ can become our own. As Sister White wrote, “The Holy Spirit is the breath of spiritual life in the soul. The impartation of the Spirit is the impartation of the life of Christ. It imbues the receiver with the attributes of Christ. Only those who are thus taught of God, those who possess the inward working of the Spirit, and in whose life the Christ-life is manifested, are to stand as representative men, to minister in behalf of the church.” *Desire of Ages*, 805

Therefore let us daily contemplate the life of Christ and encourage one another to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. Otherwise, if we maintain this critical spirit against one another we are on Satan's ground.

Verse 12

“one lawgiver”

There is only One who wrote the moral law that governs the universe. This One is the Creator of heaven and earth. He alone is worthy to judge. He alone could judge justly. He alone can read the heart, the motive, the thoughts of a man—perfectly. Therefore who are we to judge. We cannot read another man's heart. We do not know his motive. We would do a horrible job in judging the eternal destiny of others.

It is God that has given life, and He alone has the right to end that life. Yet with our critical words we destroy the peace and hope of others. God has not called us to do the works of darkness. Rather, we are to be salt and light to the world.

And since all of us are violators of God's moral law, we should be leading men to Christ—the Sin-bearer. We are to speak of the Holy Spirit who is able to recreate us into the image of God. Why do we waste our time being critical, when our words can be encouraging others to draw closer to Christ?

Verse 13

“Today and tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue...and get gain”

This verse is not against planning. We are to plan for a hundred years, yet be ready for Christ if He were to come today. But many Christians leave God out of their plans. A life plan that does not include surrendering all to God is a life set up for disaster. We do not know what tomorrow will bring. But there is one thing we can count on—if we store up treasure in heaven it will neither be destroyed nor lost.

We can become deceived by our worldly successes and begin to allow self to grow. Like Lucifer, we may begin to attribute all our gains to our own talents. But where did we get these talents? We received them from God. It is arrogance and self-centeredness that would lead us to think more and more of OUR plans and think less and less of God.

Paul wrote, “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.” 1 Timothy 6:17-19

Of course, we should not error in the other direction, namely, failing to plan or work at all. As Paul wrote, “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing.” 2 Thessalonians 3:10-13

Verse 14

“For what is your life? It is even a vapor...”

Life is more than things. Life is more than money. When you consider the shortness of life, why would we revolve our life around the uncertainty of riches? Jesus said, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Matthew 6:19-21

Not only can money quickly depreciate, but our very life can suddenly end. Even if we die of an old age, what is seventy to ninety years in view of eternity? The time we have on this earth is in preparation to receive that eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Verse 15

“If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.”

Every morning we should submit our will to the will of God. By failing to do so, we make plans without Him. But God’s will is perfect. If we could but see the end from the beginning, we would commend ourselves to the leadings of the Lord. There would be no complaint because we trust Him more than the wisdom of this world or the things of this world.

It is part of the covenant of faith that we trust in the providential leadings of God. He knows what is best. He has our best eternal interests at stake. He will never mislead or fail us.

Verse 16

“ye rejoice in your boastings”

Our little world is a history of exalting the works of men, while forgetting the Creator who made our world and who made us. The results of men boasting of their own achievements are the fruits of discord, war, and selfishness.

The church of Laodicea boasts in herself. She thinks that this worldwide church is the work of her own hands. Yet the Lord declares that she is “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” But all such self-efficiency and self-glorification is evil, and finds its source in the originator of evil—Satan.

Verse 17

“it is sin”

Sin is not only doing things you know you should not be doing, but it also includes failing to do those things that we should be doing. The first is called the sins of commission, and the later the sins of omission.

Love is not simply refraining from doing harm. Love must be an active principle that finds expression in kind words and deeds.

In the context of today’s lesson, right doing would be to submit our will and plans to God. Sin would then be the failure to communion God in laying out our life plans. Every human plan will fail, but the ways of the Lord are everlasting.

Lesson 10: Weep and Howl!

James 5:1-6

Verse 1

“rich men”

The book of James has focused on church members through chapter four, but in this verse the application seems to have a wider audience. Those who acquire great riches but leave God out of their plans will “weep and howl.” By leaving God out of the picture they have failed to help the poor. And in some cases, they have defrauded those that have worked for them.

These words of James are very strong. Are we looking at a serious transgression of one of the commandments? Indeed we are—it is the eighth commandment, which reads, “Thou shalt not steal.” Exodus 20:15

“Both public and private sins are included in this prohibition. The eighth commandment condemns manstealing and slave dealing, and forbids wars of conquest. It condemns theft and robbery. It demands strict integrity in the minutest details of the affairs of life. It forbids overreaching in trade, and requires the payment of just debts or wages. It declares that every attempt to advantage oneself by the ignorance, weakness, or misfortune of another is registered as fraud in the books of heaven.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 309

What does this commandment forbid?

There are at least two things that James focused on in these verses, namely, (1) dishonesty in the payment of wages, and (2) the neglect of helping those in need. But there are other things that this commandment forbids.

Slave trade. In the beginning God gave man dominion over the fish of the sea, the animals that roam the earth, and the birds that fly, but man was never given dominion over his fellow man.

Wars of conquest. If a nation invades another nation to acquire its resources, then this is a war of conquest and Jesus hates it.

This commandment would also include theft and robbery, overreaching in trade, and taking advantage of someone's ignorance, weakness, or misfortune

What does the commandment teach us about what is holy, just, and good?

Treating others with respect

Respecting the property and possessions of others

Meeting one another's needs

Fair trade

Paying of just debts and wages

Never taking advantage of another person's weaknesses.

General Thoughts on the Eighth Commandment

The Right to Property

Inherent in this commandment is the right to own. This is not just the right to own pots and pans, but property itself.

The patriarchs owned property as did each tribe when they reached Canaan.

At the end of each Jubilee, all Hebrew slaves were to be freed (v 10), and the land was to return to its original owner. See Leviticus 25:24-28. God's original plan was for everyone to own a small piece of land in the country.

All belongs to God

Because God owns all things (See Genesis 14:19; Exodus 19:5; Psalms 24:1), then the right to personal ownership comes from God. As such we are tenants and stewards of God's property.

Tithe

Tithing is the outward evidence that we truly believe that God is the owner of the heavens and the earth. See Genesis 14:18-20; Malachi 3:7-14.

How serious is dishonesty?

According to 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10, no "thieves, . . . extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."

Forms of Violating the Eighth Commandment

Theft

Theft is seldom the sin of ignorance. Usually some devious planning is involved. Theft is the unlawful taking of another person's goods without their consent or knowledge.

The Hebrew word for “steal,” means “to take by stealth,” or “secretly.”

Robbery

Robbery differs from theft in that it often involves force or violence.

Embezzlement

This refers to taking for example money for one’s own use when it was placed in your trust. It is the breaking of trust or the breach of trust.

Gambling

Gambling is based on chance. A person could gamble away the families’ finances and as such steal it away from its proper use. The person who takes another’s life savings on a game of cards is no less a thief. The money is unearned in the game of chance. Poverty has come to the loser, who has stolen from his own family, and the winner has taken from him the sustenance for the support of that family. Both are thieves.

Extortion

Extortion is when someone abuses their official position for money, property, or privileges. It would also include exorbitant or excessive charges. See Ezekiel 22:12; Matthew 23:25; Leviticus 25:14.

Lying Advertisement

This happens when products are said to do more than they can. Generally lying advertising is based on a false pretense.

Employers

Stealing includes the underpaying of laborers or the withholding of their wages. See Deuteronomy 24:14, 15; Leviticus 19:13; Jeremiah 22:13; James 5:4.

It is not only wrong to withhold wages; it is also wrong to delay payment beyond the time agreed upon.

The eighth commandment forbids overworking and underpaying. It demands a fair deal. “A fair wage for a fair day’s work.”

Employee

On the other hand, the employee must do a fair day’s work and give in service the equivalent of that which he receives in wages, or he, too, is a thief. See 2 Thessalonians 3:10; Proverbs 24:30-34.

Unjust Weights or Fraudulent Dealings

This is when a person pays for three pounds of flour, but your unjust weights only gives them two pounds.

Thieves of Reputations

Through gossip or slander a person can be robbed of his good name. The slanderer is a thief.

Thieves of Hope

It is wrong to plant doubts that will rob people of their hope of eternal salvation, or the hope of achieving something.

Restitution

We are to return what we have wrongfully taken. We are to pay back our debts. See Ezekiel 33:15, 16; Luke 19:8, 9.

Closing Verses: The work of the prophets

“He that oppreseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoreth him hath mercy on the poor.” Proverbs 14:31.

“Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassions every man to his brother: and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.” Zechariah 7:9, 10.

Verses 2, 3

“your riches are corrupted....garments moth-eaten....gold and silver is cankered.”

Consider the following counsel by Sister White on James 5:1-3

“God in His providence has moved upon the hearts of some of those who have riches, and has converted them to the truth, that they with their substance may assist to keep His work moving. And if those who are wealthy will not do this, if they do not fulfill the purpose of God, He will pass them by, and raise up others to fill their place who will fulfill His purpose, and with their possessions gladly distribute to meet the necessities of the cause of God. In this they will be first. God will have those in His cause who will do this.

“He could send means from heaven to carry on His work; but this is out of His order. He has ordained that men should be His instruments, that as a great sacrifice was made to redeem them, they should act a part in this work of salvation, by making a sacrifice for one another, and by thus doing show how highly they prize the sacrifice that has been made for them.” *Testimonies to the Church*, volume 1, 174

“I was directed to James 5:1-3: “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 moth-eaten. 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.” {1T 174.3}

“I saw that these fearful words apply particularly to the wealthy who profess to believe the present truth. The Lord calls them to use their means to advance His cause. Opportunities are presented to them, but they shut their eyes to the wants of the cause, and cling fast to their earthly treasure. Their love for the world is greater than their love for the truth, their love for their fellow men, or their love for God. He calls for their substance, but they selfishly, covetously, retain what they have. They give a little now and then to ease their conscience, but have not overcome their love for this world. They do not sacrifice for God. The Lord has raised up others that prize eternal life, and that can feel and realize something of the value of the soul, and they have freely bestowed their means to advance

the cause of God. The work is closing; and soon the means of those who have kept their riches, their large farms, their cattle, etc., will not be wanted. I saw the Lord turn to such in anger, in wrath, and repeat these words: "Go to now, ye rich men." He has called, but you would not hear. Love of this world has drowned His voice. Now He has no use for you, and lets you go, bidding you: "Go to now, ye rich men." {1T 174.4}

"Oh, I saw it was an awful thing to be thus forsaken by the Lord--a fearful thing to hold onto a perishable substance here, when He has said that if we will sell and give alms, we can lay up treasure in heaven. I was shown that as the work is closing up, and the truth is going forth in mighty power, these rich men will bring their means and lay it at the feet of the servants of God, begging them to accept it. The answer from the servants of God will be: "Go to now, ye rich men. Your means is not needed. Ye withheld it when ye could do good with it in advancing the cause of God. The needy have suffered; they have not been blessed by your means. God will not accept your riches now. Go to now, ye rich men." {1T 175.1}

"Then I was directed to these words: "Behold, the hire of the laborers 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." I saw that God is not in all the riches that are obtained. Satan often has much more to do with acquiring property than God. Much of it is obtained by oppressing the hireling in his wages. The naturally covetous rich man obtains his riches by grinding down the hireling, and taking advantage of individuals wherever he can, thereby adding to a treasure that will eat his flesh as it were fire. {1T 175.2}

"A strictly honest, honorable course has not been taken by some. Such must take a very different course and work fast to redeem the time. Many Sabbathkeepers are at fault here. Advantage is taken even of their poor brethren, and those who have an abundance exact more than the real worth of things, more than they would pay for the same things, while these same brethren are embarrassed and distressed for want of means. God knows all these things. Every selfish act, every covetous extortion, will bring its reward. {1T 176.1}

"I saw that it is cruel and unjust to have no consideration for a brother's situation. If he is distressed, or poor, yet doing the best he can, allowance should be made for him, and even the full value of things he may purchase of the wealthy should not be exacted; but they should have bowels of compassion for him. God will approve of such kindly acts, and the doer will not lose his reward. But a fearful account stands against many Sabbathkeepers for close, covetous acts." *Testimonies to the Church*, volume 1, 175-176

"I was pointed back to a time when there were but few who listened to and embraced the truth. They had not much of this world's goods. The wants of the cause were divided among a very few. Then it was necessary for some to sell their houses and lands, and obtain cheaper to serve them as a shelter, or home, while their means were freely and generously lent to the Lord, to publish the truth, and to otherwise aid in advancing the cause of God. As I beheld these self-sacrificing ones, I saw that they had endured privation for the benefit of the cause. I saw an angel standing by them, pointing them upward, and saying: "Ye have bags in heaven! Ye have bags in heaven that wax not old! Endure unto the end, and great will be your reward." {1T 176.3}

"God has been moving upon many hearts. The truth for which a few sacrificed so much, in order to get it before others, has triumphed, and multitudes have laid hold of it. God in His providence has moved upon those who have means, and has brought them into the truth, that as His work increases, the wants of the cause may be met. Much means has been brought into the ranks of Sabbathkeepers, and I saw that at present God does not call for the houses His people need to live in, unless expensive houses are exchanged for cheaper ones. But if those who have an abundance do not hear His voice, cut loose from the world, and dispose of a portion of their property and lands, and sacrifice for God, He will pass them by, and call for those who are willing to do anything for Jesus, even

to sell their homes to meet the wants of the cause. God will have freewill offerings. Those who give must esteem it a privilege to do so. {1T 176.4}

"Some give of their abundance, but yet they feel no lack. They do not particularly deny themselves of anything for the cause of Christ. They still have all that heart can wish. They give liberally and heartily. God regards it, and the action and motive are known and strictly marked by Him. They will not lose their reward. You who cannot bestow so liberally must not excuse yourselves because you cannot do as much as some others. Do what you can. Deny yourselves of some article that you can get along without, and sacrifice for the cause of God. Like the widow, cast in your two mites. You will actually give more than all those who give of their abundance; and you will know how sweet it is to deny self, to give to the needy, to sacrifice for the truth, and to lay up treasure in heaven. {1T 177.1}

"I was shown that the young, especially young men, who profess the truth, have yet a lesson of self-denial to learn. If these made more sacrifice for the truth, they would esteem it more highly. It would affect their hearts, and purify their lives, and they would hold it more dear and sacred.

"The young do not take the burden of the cause of God, or feel any responsibility in regard to it. Is it because God has excused them? Oh, no; they excuse themselves! They are eased, and others are burdened. They do not realize that they are not their own. Their strength, their time, is not their own. They are bought with a price. A dear sacrifice was made for them, and unless they possess the spirit of self-denial and sacrifice, they can never possess the immortal inheritance." Testimonies to the Church, volume 1, 176-178}

Verse 4

"kept back by fraud"

God warns those that keep by the wages of laborers as a serious charge. Those that have earned their wages should be paid in a timely manner. Often people needed that daily pay to buy food for that day. When the wealthy take advantage of the laborer it is particularly grievous unto God.

Verse 5

If a person lives for the luxuries of today and fails to prepare for eternity, they are like a lamb being fattened for the slaughter.

Verse 6

Often the pursuit of worldly wealth is at the expense of others. Many have been treated like slaves. The backs of many have filled the pockets of a few. This disproportionate distribution of wealth is not the work of God. In the Day of Judgment, God will make all things right.

Let us close with these words from the SOP on James 5:1-6.

"Look at the life of many who claim to be Christians. The Lord has endowed them with capabilities, and power, and influence; He has entrusted them with money, that they may be co-workers with Him in the great redemption. All His gifts are to be used in blessing humanity, in relieving the suffering and the needy. We are to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to care for the widow and the fatherless, to minister to the distressed and downtrodden. God never meant that the widespread misery in the world should exist. He never meant that one man should have an abundance of the luxuries of life, while the children of others should cry for bread. The means over and above the actual necessities of life are entrusted to man to do good, to bless humanity. The Lord says, "Sell that ye have, and give alms." Luke 12:33. Be "ready to distribute, willing to communicate." 1 Timothy 6:18. "When thou makest a

feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind." Luke 14:13. "Loose the bands of wickedness," "undo the heavy burdens," "let the oppressed go free," "break every yoke." "Deal thy bread to the hungry," "bring the poor that are cast out to thy house." "When thou seest the naked, . . . cover him." "Satisfy the afflicted soul." Isaiah 58:6, 7, 10. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Mark 16:15. These are the Lord's commands. Are the great body of professed Christians doing this work? {COL 370.1}

"Alas, how many are appropriating to themselves the gifts of God! How many are adding house to house and land to land. How many are spending their money for pleasure, for the gratification of appetite, for extravagant houses, furniture, and dress. Their fellow beings are left to misery and crime, to disease and death. Multitudes are perishing without one pitying look, one word or deed of sympathy. {COL 371.1}

"Men are guilty of robbery toward God. Their selfish use of means robs the Lord of the glory that should be reflected back to Him in the relief of suffering humanity and the salvation of souls. They are embezzling His entrusted goods. The Lord declares, "I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against . . . those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right." "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed Thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye have robbed Me, even this whole nation." Malachi 3:5, 8, 9. "Go to now, ye rich men, . . . your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you. . . . Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days." "Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton." "Behold, the hire of the laborers 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." James 5:1-3, 5, 4. {COL 371.2}

"Everyone will be required to render up his entrusted gifts. In the day of final judgment men's hoarded wealth will be worthless to them. They have nothing they can call their own. {COL 372.1}

"Those who spend their lives in laying up worldly treasure show less wisdom, less thought and care for their eternal well-being, than did the unjust steward for his earthly support. Less wise than the children of this world in their generation are these professed children of the light. These are they of whom the prophet declared, in his vision of the great judgment day, "A man shall cast the idols of his silver, and the idols of his gold [margin]; which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty, when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth." Isaiah 2:20, 21.

Lesson 11: Getting Ready for the Harvest

James 5:7-12

In this week's lesson we were introduced to a very important topic, namely, the work of the early and latter rain. I would like to focus this week's notes on that subject.

When does the latter rain fall?

"Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain; so the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain." 'He will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain.' In the East the former rain falls at the sowing time. It is necessary in order that the seed may germinate. Under the influence of the fertilizing showers, the tender shoot springs up. **The latter rain, falling near the close of the season, ripens the grain and prepares it for the sickle.** The Lord employs these operations of nature to represent the work of the Holy Spirit. As the dew and the rain are given first to cause the seed to germinate, and then to ripen the harvest,

so the Holy Spirit is given to carry forward, from one stage to another, the process of spiritual growth. The ripening of the grain represents the completion of the work of God's grace in the soul. By the power of the Holy Spirit the moral image of God is to be perfected in the character. We are to be wholly transformed into the likeness of Christ.

“The latter rain, **ripening earth's harvest**, represents the spiritual grace that prepares the church for the coming of the Son of man. But unless the former rain has fallen, there will be no life; the green blade will not spring up. Unless the early showers have done their work, the latter rain can bring no seed **to perfection**.

“There is to be ‘first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.’ There must be a constant development of Christian virtue, a constant advancement in Christian experience. This we should seek with intensity of desire, that we may adorn the doctrine of Christ our Saviour.” TM 506

The work of finishing or perfecting the image of God in the saints is committed to the work of the Holy Spirit in the form of the latter rain. But it is not done in a moment.

“As the dew and the rain are given first to cause the seed to germinate, and then to ripen the harvest, so the Holy Spirit is given to carry forward, from one stage to another, the process of spiritual growth. The ripening of the grain represents the completion of the work of God's grace in the soul. By the power of the Holy Spirit the moral image of God is to be perfected in the character. We are to be wholly transformed into the likeness of Christ.” TM 506

As we can see, part of the work of the latter rain is to bring the precious wheat to complete maturity. These finishing touches upon the character of God's people must take place before they receive the seal of the living God.

Notice this statement by Sister White after she quotes all of Revelation 13:11-17:

“This is the test that the people of God must have before they are sealed. All who proved their loyalty to God by observing His law, and refusing to accept a spurious sabbath, will rank under the banner of the Lord God Jehovah, and will receive the seal of the living God. Those who yield the truth of heavenly origin and accept the Sunday sabbath, will receive the mark of the beast.” 7 SDABC 976

In Revelation 13:11-17, there is the rise of the second beast, the United States. It performs miracle working power in the form of Spiritualism. It forms as image to the beast in uniting church and state. She passes a National Sunday Law and causes all both small and great to worship the first beast the papacy. Then God's people cannot buy and sell. In the end they face a death decree. She says, “This is the test that the people of God must have before they are sealed.”

From these statements, it seems that God's people will be judged just prior to the close of probation. They will receive the seal of the living God just before the close of probation, but after to the latter rain has done its work of bringing the precious wheat to full maturity.

After all, why would we be sealed with the seal of the living God before the latter rain has brought the wheat to perfection?

National Sunday Law

The Work of the Latter Rain

The Final Test

The Seal of the Living God

The Judgment of the Living

The Close of Probation

“When the third angel's message closes, mercy no longer pleads for the guilty inhabitants of the earth. The people of God have accomplished their work. They have received ‘the latter rain,’ ‘the refreshing from the presence of the Lord,’ and they are prepared for the trying hour before them. Angels are hastening to and fro in heaven. An angel returning from the earth announces that his work is done; the final test has been brought upon the world, and all

who have proved themselves loyal to the divine precepts have received 'the seal of the living God.' Then Jesus ceases His intercession in the sanctuary above. He lifts His hands and with a loud voice says, 'It is done;' and all the angelic host lay off their crowns as He makes the solemn announcement: 'He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.' Revelation 22:11. Every case has been decided for life or death. Christ has made the atonement for His people and blotted out their sins. The number of His subjects is made up; 'the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven," is about to be given to the heirs of salvation, and Jesus is to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.'" GC 613, 614

An angel returns to heaven and says his work is done. What work?

It is the work of bringing the final test of the Sabbath truth to the world, so that the destiny of each class is then eternally established.

Once the final test comes, which all must have before they are sealed, then immediately follows the judgment of the living, the work in the heavenly sanctuary is finished.

Let us now consider the separation of the wheat and tares.

Jesus taught us the parable of the tares and the wheat: Matthew 13:24-30

13:24 "Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:

13:25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.

13:26 But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

13:27 So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?

13:28 He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

13:29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

13:30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn."

The Sower is the Son of Man; the field is the world; the good seed is the Word and the wheat the springs forth from it are the children of God; the tares are the unsaved; and the evil sower is the devil.

When Jesus said the "field" is the "world," He was more specially referring to the church in the world. Remember, the parable is about the kingdom of God and His work in trying to save souls.

The tares are not thorns and thistles, but they are also not wheat. They are members in the church. Both the wheat and tares grow together in the church until the time of harvest. The harvest is the end of the world. Matt 13:39. This must be understood to be the end of probationary time.

As Sister White wrote, "The tares and the wheat are to grow together until the harvest; and the harvest is the end of probationary time." COL 72

"The looker-on may discern no difference; but there is One who said that the tares were not to be plucked up by human hands lest the wheat be rooted up also. Let both grow together until the harvest. Then the Lord sends forth His reapers to gather out the tares and bind them in bundles to burn, while the wheat is gathered into the heavenly garner. The time of the judgment is a most solemn period, when the Lord gathers His own from among

the tares. Those who have been members of the same family are separated. A mark is placed upon the righteous.” TM 234

“There will be those among us who will always want to control the work of God, **to dictate even what movements shall be made when the work goes forward under the direction of the angel who joins the third angel in the message to be given to the world.** God will use ways and means by which it will be seen that He is taking the reins in His own hands. The workers will be surprised by the simple means that He will use to bring about and perfect His work of righteousness.” TM 300

“The tares closely resembled the wheat while the blades were green; but when the field was white for the harvest, the worthless weeds bore no likeness to the wheat that bowed under the weight of its full, ripe heads. Sinners who make a pretension of piety mingle for a time with the true followers of Christ, and the semblance of Christianity is calculated to deceive many; but in the harvest of the world there will be no likeness between good and evil. Then those who have joined the church, but who have not joined Christ, will be manifest.” COL 74

Neither the wheat nor the tares come to full maturity until the latter rain has done its work. That is not to say that the tares receive the latter rain, but that the perfection of the wheat under the latter rain, and the compromise made by the tares under the pressure of the Sunday laws will make it evident, which are the wheat and which are the tares.

Consider Calvary where righteousness shown most gloriously, and when sin appeared its worst.

The greater the outpouring of the latter rain the more beautiful the true and faithful appear, and the true nature of the tare appears. All pretense is now swept away.

Consider it from an agricultural view. What farmer would harvest his crop just before the latter rain? None.

Separation and Unity

“The casting of the net is the preaching of the gospel. This gathers both good and evil into the church. When the mission of the gospel is completed, the judgment will accomplish the work of separation. Christ saw how the existence of false brethren in the church would cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of. The world would revile the gospel because of the inconsistent lives of false professors. Even Christians would be caused to stumble as they saw that many who bore Christ's name were not controlled by His Spirit. Because these sinners were in the church, men would be in danger of thinking that God excused their sins. Therefore Christ lifts the veil from the future and bids all to behold that it is character, not position, which decides man's destiny. Both the parable of the tares and that of the net plainly teach that there is no time when all the wicked will turn to God. The wheat and the tares grow together until the harvest. The good and the bad fish are together drawn ashore for a final separation. When the mission of the gospel is completed, the judgment will accomplish the work of separation.” COL 122, 123

According to this statement how long do the tares remain in the church? Until the mission of the gospel is complete.

It is the mission of the gospel to finish the work inside of each of us, and in proclaiming the truth to the whole world.

And what finishes the work inside of each of us and the proclamation of the truth to the whole world? It is the latter rain.

Therefore we cannot be judged and separated as a people before the latter rain. It must be after the latter rain has done its work.

And when will the latter rain cease to fall? When every case has been decided for either the seal of the living God or the mark of the beast.

Therefore, the wheat and the tares will grow together, just like Jesus said, until the harvest.

And what comes at the end of the work of the gospel? The final separation. Has there already been separations among us?

1844: Physical Separation

1888: Spiritual Separation

“The mighty shaking has commenced and will go on, and all will be shaken out who are not willing to take a bold and unyielding stand for the truth and to sacrifice for God and His cause.” EW 50

“Just as long as God has a church, he will have those who will cry aloud and spare not, who will be his instruments to reprove selfishness and sins, and will not shun to declare the whole counsel of God, whether men will hear or forbear. I saw that individuals would rise up against the plain testimonies. It does not suit their natural feelings. They would choose to have smooth things spoken unto them, and have peace cried in their ears. I view the church in a more dangerous condition than they ever have been. Experimental religion is known but by a few. The shaking must soon take place to purify the church.” 2SG 284

“I asked the meaning of the shaking I had seen and was shown that it would be caused by the straight testimony called forth by the counsel of the True Witness to the Laodiceans. This will have its effect upon the heart of the receiver, and will lead him to exalt the standard and pour forth the straight truth. Some will not bear this straight testimony. They will rise up against it, and this is what will cause a shaking among God's people.> I saw that the testimony of the True Witness has not been half heeded. The solemn testimony upon which the destiny of the church hangs has been lightly esteemed, if not entirely disregarded. This testimony must work deep repentance; all who truly receive it will obey it and be purified.” EW 270

During the time of the latter rain, the wise and foolish virgins are still in the church. When the work goes forward, both tares and wheat will come into the church. In the end, at the time of the harvest, the separation will take place. After all, the foolish virgins are right there in the church near the very end.

Consider this solemn statement:

“God leads His people on, step by step. He brings them up to different points calculated to manifest what is in the heart. Some endure at one point, but fall off at the next. At every advanced point the heart is tested and tried a little closer. If the professed people of God find their hearts opposed to this straight work, it should convince them that they have a work to do to overcome, if they would not be spewed out of the mouth of the Lord. Said the angel: ‘God will bring His work closer and closer to test and prove every one of His people.’ Some are willing to receive one point; but when God brings them to another testing point, they shrink from it and stand back, because they find that it strikes directly at some cherished idol. Here they have opportunity to see what is in their hearts that shuts out Jesus. They prize something higher than the truth, and their hearts are not prepared to receive Jesus. Individuals are tested and proved a length of time to see if they will sacrifice their idols and heed the counsel of the True Witness. If any will not be purified through obeying the truth, and overcome their selfishness, their pride, and evil passions, the angels of God have the charge: ‘They are joined to their idols, let them alone,’ and they pass on to their work, leaving these with their sinful traits unsubdued, to the control of evil angels. **Those who come up to every point, and stand every test, and overcome, be the price what it may, have heeded the counsel of the True Witness, and they will receive the latter rain, and thus be fitted for translation.**” 1T 187

The Sealing Work

“The Lord has shown me clearly that the image of the beast will be formed before probation closes; for it is to be the great test for the people of God, by which their eternal destiny will be decided. . . . [Revelation 13:11-17 quoted.]....This is the test that the people of God must have before they are sealed. All who proved their loyalty to God by observing His law, and refusing to accept a spurious sabbath, will rank under the banner of the Lord God Jehovah, and will receive the seal of the living God. Those who yield the truth of heavenly origin and accept the Sunday sabbath, will receive the mark of the beast (Letter 11, 1890).” SDABC, volume 7, 976

No one receives the seal of the living God until he has passed the test imposed by the setting up of the image of the beast. That test comes first and then the seal of God follows on all those who have passed this fearful test. Therefore no one living has that seal placed on them at this time, because the test has not yet come.

“When the third angel's message closes, mercy no longer pleads for the guilty inhabitants of the earth. The people of God have accomplished their work. They have received ‘the latter rain,’ ‘the refreshing from the presence of the Lord,’ and they are prepared for the trying hour before them. Angels are hastening to and fro in heaven. An angel returning from the earth announces that his work is done; the final test has been brought upon the world, and all who have proved themselves loyal to the divine precepts have received ‘the seal of the living God.’ Then Jesus ceases His intercession in the sanctuary above.” GC 613

The great test comes, those who remain faithful will receive the seal of the living God, then probation closes.

But there are two seals.

Paul wrote, “That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise,” Ephesians 1:12, 13

Paul is not talking about a future seal, but one that the saints have already received. Does this mean they have passed the great final test? No.

Consider Revelation 9:1, 4, “And the fifth angel sounded,...And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.”

The fact that they were to hurt only those men without the seal of God, is a clear indication that there were those with the seal of God in their foreheads at that time.

“The law of God, which is perfect holiness, is the only true standard of character. Love is expressed in obedience, and perfect love casteth out all fear. Those who love God, have the seal of God in their foreheads, and work the works of God.” Sons and Daughters of God, page 51

“Just as soon as the people of God are sealed in their foreheads--it is not any seal or mark that can be seen, **but a settling into the truth**, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved--just as soon as God's people are sealed and prepared for the shaking, it will come. Indeed, it has begun already; the judgments of God are now upon the land, to give us warning, that we may know what is coming.” 4SDABC 1161

This statement defines the sealing as being a settling into the truth both intellectually and spiritually. This pictures a time-absorbing process, for no one settles into the truth instantly.

You might say that the “first seal” prepares us for the “second seal.”

It is true that the seal of God is a sign of ownership, but how do we belong to God?

Righteousness is being sealed in, and sin is being sealed out.

“God's ideal for His children is higher than the highest human thought can reach. ‘Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.’ This command is a promise. The plan of redemption contemplates our complete recovery from the power of Satan. Christ always separates the contrite soul from sin. He came to destroy the works of the devil, and He has made provision that the Holy Spirit shall be imparted to every repentant soul, to keep him from sinning.” DA 311

In Ephesians 1:12, 13, we receive the Holy Spirit as a seal. Therefore, according to the above statement, the Holy Spirit seals us against sin or seals sin out and righteousness in.

This makes the seal of God more than merely a stamp of approval. The seal is the actual presence of the Holy Spirit in the life as a seal against the determined efforts of the devil to tempt us into sin.

The seal of God is therefore the power of God, which is the power of the Holy Spirit, of which the Sabbath is its greatest sign.

Genesis 2:1-3 Creative power

Exodus 20:8-11 Creative power

Deuteronomy 5:12-16 Power to deliver

Ezekiel 20:12 Power to sanctify

The work of the gospel is the sealing work of the Holy Spirit.

The former rain is the work of the Holy Spirit. The latter rain is the work of the Holy Spirit. The former begins the work, the latter brings it to perfection and maturity.

“Just as soon as the people of God are sealed in their foreheads—it is not any seal or mark that can be seen, **but a settling into the truth**, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved—just as soon as God's people are sealed and prepared for the shaking, it will come. Indeed, it has begun already; the judgments of God are now upon the land, to give us warning, that we may know what is coming.” 4SDABC 1161

This is the first seal, not the second seal. We are not to be settling into the truth as some future event. We must be settling into the truth now.

When God's people receive the seal of the living God, it is after the great final test. Before we face the great final test, we had better been already settling into the truth as not to be moved.

“The Lord has shown me the danger of letting our minds be filled with worldly thoughts and cares. I saw that some minds are led away from present truth and a love of the Holy Bible by reading other exciting books; others are filled with perplexity and care for what they shall eat, drink, and wear. Some are looking too far off for the coming of the Lord. Time has continued a few years longer than they expected; therefore they think it may continue a few years more, and in this way their minds are being led from present truth, out after the world. In these things I saw great danger; for if the mind is filled with other things, present truth is shut out, and there is no place in our foreheads for the seal of the living God. I saw that the time for Jesus to be in the most holy place was nearly finished and that time can last but a very little longer. What leisure time we have should be spent in searching the Bible, which is to judge us in the last day.

“My dear brethren and sisters, let the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ be in your minds continually and let them crowd out worldly thoughts and cares. When you lie down and when you rise up, let them be your meditation. Live and act wholly in reference to the coming of the Son of man. The sealing time is very short, and will soon be over. Now is the time, while the four angels are holding the four winds, to make our calling and election sure.” EW 58

The Battle with Sin

“The result of the eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is manifest in every man's experience. There is in his nature a bent to evil, a force which, unaided, he cannot resist. To withstand this force, to attain that ideal which in his inmost soul he accepts as alone worthy, he can find help in but one power. That power is Christ. Co-operation with that power is man's greatest need.” ED 29

“When the soul surrenders itself to Christ, a new power takes possession of the new heart. A change is wrought which man can never accomplish for himself. It is a supernatural work, bringing a supernatural element into human nature. The soul that is yielded to Christ becomes **His own fortress**, which He holds in a revolted world,

and He intends that no authority shall be known in it but His own. A soul thus kept in possession by the heavenly agencies is impregnable to the assaults of Satan.” DA 324

“Now, while our great High Priest is making the atonement for us, we should seek to become perfect in Christ. Not even by a thought could our Saviour be brought to yield to the power of temptation. Satan finds in human hearts some point where he can gain a foothold; some sinful desire is cherished, by means of which his temptations assert their power. But Christ declared of Himself: ‘The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me.’ John 14:30. Satan could find nothing in the Son of God that would enable him to gain the victory. He had kept His Father’s commandments, and there was no sin in Him that Satan could use to his advantage. This is the condition in which those must be found who shall stand in the time of trouble.” GC 623

From these statements we can understand that we are to fear the enemy within more than the enemy without.

Think of a fortress against whom the enemy has come to conquer. But the walls are high and thick, the moat is wide and deep, and the enemy cannot knock down these walls. The enemy without cannot come in.

But what if the enemy were inside the impregnable walls? Could he not open the door for the enemy on the outside to come in?

The one enemy within is more powerful than the army outside.

While sin still abides within we may think with all the confidence manifested by Peter of old that we can resist the devil and not betray the Lord, but as the enemy approaches, some sinful desire which we have cherished and failed to give away, provides the access for Satan, who seeks to overthrow us.

For many people, if not most, it is inconceivable that anyone could ever come to the place where there is no sinful desire in the heart.

But can we possess purity of heart?

Consider someone who had a nicotine addiction from smoking. Could he be completely free from this addiction with no more desire for a cigarette? Yes.

If this is true in the physical realm, could it also be true in the spiritual?

If we would consider Peter again. There was an enemy inside of Peter that he did not know. The Lord permitted Peter to fail Him and to see the evil within his own heart. When Peter denied the Lord thrice, what a revelation that could not be denied. It was terrible to deny the Lord, but what a blessing to see so clearly his own fault.

While Satan desired to show that Peter belonged to him, the Lord allowed Peter to fail to save him.

The problem with Peter’s failure was not the lack of power in the Lord, but in the blindness of the disciple and his self-will and self-confidence.

Peter now saw the enemy within. As Sister White wrote, “Now his self-confidence was gone. Never again were the old boastful assertions repeated.” COL 154

If we are willing to see, the Lord will help us to see our true spiritual condition.

Once the enemy within has been identified, it can now be destroyed through heartfelt confession of sin. That we not only confess the evil we committed, but also confess the evil inside of us.

“The religion of Christ means more than the forgiveness of sin; it means taking away our sins, and filling the vacuum with the graces of the Holy Spirit.” COL 419, 420

Is this the work of the former rain under the Holy Spirit, or the latter rain under the Holy Spirit?

Both the former rain and the latter rain are the work of the Holy Spirit, and as such, both are part of the first seal.

Consider the following:

“Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain; so the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain.’ ‘He will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain.’ In the East the former rain falls at the sowing time. It is necessary in order that the seed may germinate. Under the influence of the fertilizing showers, the tender shoot springs up. The latter rain, falling near the close of the season, ripens the grain and prepares it for the sickle. The Lord employs these operations of nature to represent the work of the Holy Spirit. As the dew and the rain are given first to cause the seed to germinate, and then to ripen the harvest, so the Holy Spirit is given to carry forward, from one stage to another, the process of spiritual growth. The ripening of the grain represents the completion of the work of God's grace in the soul. By the power of the Holy Spirit the moral image of God is to be perfected in the character. We are to be wholly transformed into the likeness of Christ.

“The latter rain, ripening earth's harvest, represents the spiritual grace that prepares the church for the coming of the Son of man. But unless the former rain has fallen, there will be no life; the green blade will not spring up. Unless the early showers have done their work, the latter rain can bring no seed to perfection.” TM 506

The former rain falls at the beginning of the season, and it is that which causes the seed to germinate and spring forth. The grain advances in growth, showing promise of an abundant harvest. This is followed by a drier period of steady growth from the sunshine and the dew. It is not ready for harvest, it needs the showers of the latter rain to bring it to maturity.

No grain is ready before the latter rain. So the latter rain falls over a period of time. The grain ripens. The work that began in the early spring is coming to completion. As last, it is time for the harvest.

The only difference between the former and latter rain is in the time when they fall. One begins spiritual growth and the latter its finishing touch. But the purpose of both is the steady growth of Christian maturity.

If the work of the first seal is the work of the Holy Spirit in us, represented by both the former and latter rain, then what is the second seal, the seal of the living God?

If the seal of the living God is for those who have passed the great final test, then what is left?

Now let us consider several statements identifying the seal of the living God:

The seal and the Sabbath

“The time has come, when all who have an interest in their soul's salvation should earnestly and solemnly inquire, What is the seal of God?” ST, Nov. 1, 1899

The first time Ellen White associated the seal with the Sabbath was in 1848. A few months later, in January 1849, Joseph Bates, the pioneer Sabbath theologian, published the first Adventist book on the subject and called it, *A Seal of the Living God*.

“The four angels are holding the four winds that a special work may be accomplished: the saints of God are to be sealed in their foreheads. Brethren, how long before you will be ready for the seal of God? Every step you advance upon the path which God forbids, toward your own pleasure and in sin, is a step nearer your destruction. Every act of disobedience to the word of the Lord is exposing you to irreparable loss. Every moment of ease, of self-indulgence, secured by you in neglecting the divine admonitions and call to duty in earnest work for the Master, is placing you under the power and control of the prince of darkness. Your candlestick may at any moment be moved out of its place.” RH, June 7, 1887

“‘The seal of God’ law is found in the fourth commandment.” GC 452

“The Sabbath of the fourth commandment is the seal of the living God. It points to God as the Creator, and is the sign of His rightful authority over the beings He has made.” ST, March 22, 1910.

“But the seal of the living God is placed upon those who conscientiously keep the Sabbath of the Lord.” RH, July 13, 1897

“Too late they see that the Sabbath of the fourth commandment is the seal of the living God.” GC 640

“The seal of the living God will be placed upon those only who bear a likeness to Christ in character.” RH, May 21, 1895

The seal as protection

Revelation 6:17-7:2 “For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand? And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea,...”

“Four mighty angels hold back the powers of this earth till the servants of God are sealed in their foreheads.” 7SDABC 967

“Satan was trying his every art to hold them where they were, until the sealing was past, until the covering was drawn over God’s people, and they left without a shelter from the burning wrath of God, in the seven last plagues.” EW 43, 44 (SD 342)

“Those who receive the seal of the living God and are protected in the time of trouble must reflect the image of Jesus fully.” EW 71

Lesson 12: Prayer, Healing, and Restoration

James 5:13-20

Verse 13

“afflicted”

This word comes from a Greek word meaning “to suffer misfortune.” When we suffer misfortune, we are to pray and not to murmur.

There are some very beautiful promises we can claim when we “suffer misfortune.”

“And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” Psalm 50:15

“For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” 2 Timothy 1:12

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28

“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” Hebrews 13:5

“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform [it] until the day of Jesus Christ.” Php 1:6

“Is any merry?”

In the same way that those who suffer misfortune should pray, those who are merry should sing psalms. There is a connection between suffering and prayer, as there is in being happy and singing psalms.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” Colossians 3:16

“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; 5:19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; 5:20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;” Ephesians 5:18-20

Verse 14

“Is any sick among you?”

These words have to do with physical sickness. The one who is sick is to take the initiative and call the elders for special prayer. We are always to pray, but we should make the prayer of the sick a special occasion for prayer.

As the elders pray for the individual they are to anoint him with oil. There is no power in the oil, and we are not to perform this act as a mere ceremony. Oil is symbolical of both the Holy Spirit and healing. As the individual is anointed with oil, he is committing himself to the work of the Holy Spirit to give up those things that may have led to his sickness, and to believe in God’s ability to heal.

We are not to demand that God heals someone, but we leave them in God’s care. God knows what is best. God may or may not heal them. If He does heal them, then He may do so immediately or over time.

Verse 15

“the prayer of faith”

Often we have not because we ask not. At other times, we have not because we have no faith. The prayer of faith is faith in God and God alone. It is a dependency and trust in God. The prayer of faith leaves all in God’s hands, knowing that He loves and will do what is best.

It is God that brings about the healing. He may answer our petition for healing and He may not. He may choose to heal the individual immediately or choose to heal him through the use of natural remedies.

The prayer of faith must then include cooperation with God. We have faith in Him, we have faith in His ways, and we have faith in His remedies. And if we have faith that He will forgive us of our sins, we will forgive us and we will be healed spiritually.

We have always encouraged the one asking for prayer to make sure that they are right with God. We do not want any unconfessed sins to prevent healing from taking place. But God will not heal someone who continues to bring disease upon themselves through unhealthy practices. If we pray for healing, we must also pray for strength to live a healthy life.

Verse 16

“Confess your faults”

There are sins that we are to confess alone to God. But if we have wronged a brother we should seek forgiveness from him. By making confession we have a clear conscience, which enhances the healing process. There is a great sympathy between the physical, mental, and spiritual. Many experience physical symptoms because there are unresolved issues with others.

Sister White wrote, “The apostle says, ‘Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.’ James 5:16. Confess your sins to God, who only can forgive them, and your faults to one another. If you

have given offense to your friend or neighbor, you are to acknowledge your wrong, and it is his duty freely to forgive you. Then you are to seek the forgiveness of God, because the brother you have wounded is the property of God, and in injuring him you sinned against his Creator and Redeemer. The case is brought before the only true Mediator, our great High Priest, who 'was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin,' and who is 'touched with the feeling of our infirmities,' and is able to cleanse from every stain of iniquity. Hebrews 4:15." SC 37

Our desire to be cleansed of any physical malady is to teach us to be free from sin. God is just as able to heal a broken limb as He is to mend a broken heart.

"The effectual prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

"James says; 'the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.' By sincere, earnest prayer parents should make a hedge about their children. They should pray with full faith that God will abide with them, and that holy angels will guard them and their children from Satan's cruel power." ML 31

"Daniel prayed to God, not exalting himself or claiming any goodness: 'O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for Thine own sake, O my God.' This is what James calls the effectual, fervent prayer. Of Christ it is said: 'And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly.' In what contrast to this intercession by the Majesty of heaven are the feeble, heartless prayers that are offered to God. Many are content with lip service, and but few have a sincere, earnest, affectionate longing after God.

"Communion with God imparts to the soul an intimate knowledge of His will. But many who profess the faith know not what true conversion is. They have no experience in communion with the Father through Jesus Christ, and have never felt the power of divine grace to sanctify the heart. Praying and sinning, sinning and praying, their lives are full of malice, deceit, envy, jealousy, and self-love. The prayers of this class are an abomination to God. True prayer engages the energies of the soul and affects the life. He who thus pours out his wants before God feels the emptiness of everything else under heaven. 'All my desire is before Thee,' said David, 'and my groaning is not hid from Thee.' 'My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?' 'When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me.'" 4T 534, 535

Verse 17, 18

"subject to like passions"

Elijah was a great prophet of God, but he did not have superhuman powers. He was born with the same nature that we are born with. But he did exercise faith with God and God took him to heaven.

He prayed earnestly according to God's will concerning the rain. By faith, according to God's will, he prayed that it would not rain—and it did not.

When it was time to pray for rain according to God's will, he did so—and it rained.

Sister White wrote, "Again and again Elijah sent his servant to a point overlooking the Mediterranean, to learn whether there were any visible token that God had heard his prayer. Each time the servant returned with the word, 'There is nothing.' The prophet did not become impatient or lose faith, but continued his earnest pleading. Six times the servant returned with the word that there was no sign of rain in the brassy heavens. Undaunted, Elijah sent him forth once more; and this time the servant returned with the word, 'Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea like a man's hand.'

“This was enough. Elijah did not wait for the heavens to gather blackness. In that small cloud he beheld by faith an abundance of rain; and he acted in harmony with his faith, sending his servant quickly to Ahab with the message, ‘Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not.’

“It was because Elijah was a man of large faith that God could use him in this grave crisis in the history of Israel. As he prayed, his faith reached out and grasped the promises of Heaven, and he persevered in prayer until his petitions were answered. He did not wait for the full evidence that God had heard him, but was willing to venture all on the slightest token of divine favor. And yet what he was enabled to do under God, all may do in their sphere of activity in God's service; for of the prophet from the mountains of Gilead it is written: ‘Elias 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.’” James 5:17.” PK 156, 157

Verse 19

“if any of you do err from the truth”

James is concerned about each church member. His final appeal to for us to look after one another. If any seem to stray, do all that you can to bring them back. God in His mercy has entrusted each precious soul that has come to our local churches. We should do all that we can to help each one to grow in Christ.

There are many temptations that could pull members away—therefore let us do all that we can to see them return unto the Lord.

Sister White wrote, “There are many who err and who feel their shame and folly. They look upon their mistakes and errors until they are driven almost to desperation. These souls we are not to neglect. When one has to swim against the stream, there is all the force of the current driving him back. Let a helping hand then be held out to him as was the Elder Brother's hand to the sinking Peter. Speak to him hopeful words. . . .

“Thy brother, sick in spirit, needs thee as thou thyself has needed a brother's love. He needs the experience of one who has been as weak as he, one who can sympathize with him and help him. The knowledge of our own weakness should help us to help another in his need. Never should we pass by one suffering soul without seeking to impart to him the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

“It is fellowship with Christ, personal contact with a living Saviour, that enables the mind and heart and soul to triumph over the lower nature. Tell the wanderer of an almighty Hand that will hold him up, of an infinite humanity in Christ that pities him. It is not enough for him to believe in law and force, things that have no pity and never hear the call for help. He needs to clasp a hand that is warm, to trust in a heart full of tenderness. Keep his mind stayed on the thought of a divine presence ever beside him, ever looking upon him with pitying love. Bid him think of a Father's heart that ever grieves over sin, of a Father's hand stretched out still, of a Father's voice saying, ‘Let him take hold of my strength, and make peace with me . . .’ (Isaiah 27:5).

“As you engage in this work you have companions unseen by human eyes. Angels of heaven were beside the Samaritan who cared for the wounded stranger. Angels from the heavenly courts stand by the side of all who do God's service in ministering to their fellow men. And you have the cooperation of Christ Himself. He is the restorer, and as you work under His supervision you will see great results.” HP 295

Verse 20

“shall save a soul from death”

All heaven rejoices over one sinner that repents. It is a great work, even the most important work to see someone saved for the kingdom. They will be saved from eternal death by receiving eternal life. Their sins, though they be many, are forgiven and hidden.

Sister White wrote, "Whatever the character of the offense, this does not change the plan that God has made for the settlement of misunderstandings and personal injuries. Speaking alone and in the spirit of Christ to the one who is in fault, will often remove the difficulty. Go to the erring one, with a heart filled with Christ's love and sympathy, and seek to adjust the matter. Reason with him calmly and quietly. Let no angry words escape your lips. Speak in a way that will appeal to his better judgment. Remember the words, 'He which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.' [James 5:20.]

"Take to your brother the remedy that will cure the disease of disaffection. Do your part to help him. For the sake of the peace and unity of the church, feel it a privilege as well as a duty to do this. If he will hear you, you have gained him as a friend.

"All heaven is interested in the interview between the one who has been injured and the one who is in error. As the erring one accepts the reproof offered in the love of Christ, and acknowledges his wrong, asking forgiveness from God and from his brother, the sunshine of heaven fills his heart. The controversy is ended; friendship and confidence are restored. The oil of love removes the soreness caused by the wrong; the Spirit of God binds heart to heart; and there is music in heaven over the union brought about." GW 499, 500

Lesson 13: The Everlasting Gospel

"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." Romans 5:19. By the disobedience of one man, Adam, we were all born with fallen natures with the inclination to sin. Even so, by the obedience of one man, Jesus Christ, we can all have new natures and "be made righteous."

So the question becomes, "How can the righteousness of that one man, Jesus Christ, make me righteous?" This is what the gospel is all about. How can God take a sinner and not only forgive him for his past sins, but also change his life to do that which is altogether beautiful and just?

We have all struggled with sin. As Paul describes this struggle, saying, "For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me....I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good....Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" Romans 7:15-17, 21, 24. NASB

Who alone can save us from this terrible fallen condition? It is Jesus. As Paul wrote, "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God 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 8:3, 4

For centuries men have tried to keep God's law with their fallen natures. What was the result? It was one hundred percent failure. So what did God do? He sent His own Son in the likeness of our "sinful flesh" and He condemned sin in the flesh by living a sinless life in our sinful flesh. As a result, Jesus became our perfect sacrifice for sin. Through Him we may be forgiven for all our sins because He lived a sinless life.

But the perfect life of Jesus did more than pay the penalty for our sins. It is now possible for the “righteousness of law” to “be fulfilled in us.” Imagine that! Christ came not only to forgive us of our past sins, but He also opened the way for us to do what we know we should be doing. This is the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are more than forgiven, we are changed!

The book of Romans teaches us how to be both forgiven and transformed. In doing so, Paul will help us understand the relationship between the perfect and sinless life of Jesus and God’s perfect Ten Commandments. That’s right! Paul will explain the connection between the righteousness of Christ and His righteous law.

The Righteousness of Christ in Relation to the Law

When we consider the relationship between the righteousness of Christ and His perfect law, what has happened throughout history? The Jewish nation accepted the perfect moral law but rejected the perfect and sinless Messiah, Jesus Christ. Therefore, it was impossible for them to understand the perfect relationship between the righteousness of Christ and the law.

Much of the Christian world has accepted the perfect and sinless life of Jesus but has rejected God’s moral law as still binding upon the believer. Therefore, it has been impossible for many of them to understand the perfect relationship between the righteousness of Christ and His perfect law. So let us begin by defining the term “righteousness.”

What is “righteousness”?

The Bible says, “My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness.” Psalm 119:172.

“Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law;” Isaiah 51:7.

“But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.” Romans 9:31.

It is clear from these verses that the law of God is the “law of righteousness,” that all of God’s commandments “are righteousness,” that those who know God’s law “know righteousness.”

The apostle Paul wrote that the law of God is “holy, and just, and good. . . . For we know that the law is spiritual.” Romans 7:12, 14.

The beloved John wrote, “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.” 1 John 3:4.

Jesus had summarized the law by one’s love for God and his fellowman. See Matthew 22:36-39.

So we can truly learn about righteousness from two sources. First, there is the altogether beautiful and perfect life of Jesus. Second, there is God’s great moral standard of righteousness, His holy law.

What does God’s righteous law direct us to do?

“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” Galatians 3:24.

When we look at the perfect law of righteousness it teaches us that we are sinners. As such, it points us to the need of a Savior. It points us to Jesus.

The law helps us to understand what sin truly is. The Bible says, "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. . . . For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. . . . Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful." Romans 7:7, 9, 13.

The law is not against us; rather, it is for us by showing us our true condition. The law reveals sin in us. It causes us to flee to Christ for forgiveness. As Paul wrote, "Moreover the law entered, that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Romans 5:20.

The deeper I understand God's law the more sinful my sins appear. The more my sinfulness becomes apparent, the greater grace appears. The more I realize my helplessness, the more I will depend upon Christ for mercy and strength. It is good to see my sinfulness that I might know Him who is mighty to save.

Can the law justify me? Or, can I be justified by the works of the law?

"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 3:20.

"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." Galatians 2:16.

The Bible clearly teaches that we cannot erase our sinful past by keeping God's law in the present.

Why can't we be justified by the works of the law?

"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." James 2:10.

It is not possible to be justified by a perfect law that we have already broken. Even if we could keep God's law perfectly today and forever on our own, we would still fall short of being justified by it. Why? We have already broken God's perfect law.

So how can I stand justified before God?

We can stand innocent before God by accepting the pardoning power of Christ's death for our sins. The Bible says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9. When I ask God to forgive me of my sins, He keeps His promise, and He forgives me of my sins. I now stand justified in God's sight.

Can I earn salvation by my good deeds or the works of the law?

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." Ephesians 2:8.

"And if by grace, then is it 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 11:6.

We are either saved by the grace of God or we earn salvation. It cannot be both. It is either a gift from God or we earn it.

So how can we be accounted righteous when the law already condemns us?

“But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” 1 Corinthians 1:30.

Jesus is our righteousness, both imputed and imparted. This is why Jesus is called “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.” Jeremiah 23:6.

We have no righteousness of our own. The law defines what is righteous, but the law cannot give us righteousness. We receive righteousness from only one source, that is, Jesus Christ.

Jesus becomes the Son of man

To save man from his sinful condition, to rescue man from the condemnation of the law, the Father sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, into our world.

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” John 1:14.

“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God 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 8:3, 4.

In the weakness of our fallen flesh, we are not able to keep God’s perfect law. Therefore, God sent His own Son in the likeness of our sinful flesh to live a perfect life according to His perfect law. He did this that we might now walk in obedience to His perfect law through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Paul testifies that Jesus “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” Hebrews 4:15.

Through a constant surrender of His will to His Father, Christ was able to say at the end of His life, “I have kept My Father’s commandments. . . . I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do.” John 15:10; 17:4.

Jesus came in our fallen flesh to live a life for us. Day by day, choice by choice, Jesus wove in His own life a robe of righteous obedience to the Ten Commandments. Why did He do all this? He did it for us. He wanted to save us from our transgression of His perfect law. He came to pay the penalty of our sins, which is death. See Romans 6:23. He wanted us to be able to live a new life of obedience in Him, that we may enjoy eternity with the Father forever.

When I look into the perfect mirror of God’s law, it condemns me as a sinner. When Jesus looks into the perfect mirror of God’s law, it declares that He is righteous. Therefore, for me to stand innocent before God’s perfect law I must have Christ’s righteousness.

I have no righteousness of my own to meet the claims of God’s righteous law. Through Christ’s perfect sacrifice for sin I am able to be forgiven of my past sins and stand innocent before God. By allowing Jesus to live in my heart by faith I am now able to live a new life in obedience to God’s Ten Commandments.

Therefore, the gospel is the good news of how Jesus kept God’s law perfectly for us, that He might be our perfect Savior in the forgiveness of sin, and our perfect Savior in the deliverance from sin. The Bible says, “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.” Matthew 1:21.

What is imputed righteousness?

Paul wrote, “Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.” Romans 4:6. The word “imputeth” is the same as the word “credit.”

God will credit the perfect, sinless, and righteous life of Jesus to your account in heaven. Did you catch that! When God forgives you of your sins, you are more than forgiven of your past. He also credits to your account the thirty-three years of Christ’s sinless life.

Do we deserve to have Christ’s perfect life credited to us as if we lived His life? Absolutely not! But due to God’s love and grace, He not only forgives us of our sinful past, but also credits to us the life of His dear Son as if we lived that life.

Now if God is willing to credit to you the sinless life of Jesus, are you willing to serve Him with your whole heart? Do you want God to do more than credit the life of His Son to you? Do you want Him to impart that life to you?

What is the imparted righteousness of Christ?

Through the work of the Holy Spirit the perfect and sinless life of Jesus may be imparted to us. Remember, God’s forgiveness is more than a judicial act which sets us free from the condemnation of the law. Jesus came to deliver us from sin. Those who are forgiven are changed. This is the good news of the gospel.

The message of righteousness by faith is a most precious message that invites the people to receive the righteousness of Christ. What is the righteousness of Christ? It is perfect obedience to all the commandments of God. As Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep the commandments.” John 14:15.

So how do I know if Christ dwells in me by the power of the Holy Spirit? If the love of God dwells in us, our feelings, our thoughts, our purposes, our actions, will be in harmony with the will of God as expressed in the Ten Commandments.

In summary, Christ lived a sinless life in our fallen flesh. He lived in perfect obedience to His Father’s commands. Christ died for us to pay the penalty for our sins. Christ is risen and offers us His own righteousness to replace our garments stained with sin. If we accept Him as our Savior, no matter how sinful our past, for His sake we are accounted righteous. Christ will impute or credit to our account in heaven His own righteousness.

More than this, Christ changes the heart. He abides in our heart by faith. If we maintain our connection with Him, He will work in us to will and to do according to His good pleasure. So then we can say, “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” Galatians 2:20.

So what is the perfect relationship between the sinless life of Christ and His perfect and righteous law?

We can have all the righteousness that the law requires, but we cannot obtain this righteousness from the law itself. We cannot obtain it by simply trying harder. We receive righteousness from only one place. We receive it from Christ. He is the Righteous One. When we receive Him, we receive who He is. And who is Jesus? He is the perfect, sinless, and righteous Son of God. The more we have of Him the more righteousness we have received.

So what is the key to receiving righteousness? It is receiving Jesus every day as your life. As John wrote, “He that hath the Son hath life: and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” 1 John 5:12. Do you want life? Do you want righteousness? Then have more of Jesus, the Righteous One.
