

James 26-09-20a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services here at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 20th day of September 2026. We continue our study in the book of James.

Let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study and we'll begin. Father, how grateful we are for this time of fellowship, for the celebration and restoration and encouragement that we receive as we spend time together as a group looking at your word, being blessed by the presence of your Holy Spirit and encouraged by the example of our Lord Jesus. We thank you for him.

We thank you for his example of faithfulness and obedience. We thank you for his communication to us through the apostles who have written these letters on our behalf. And we pray that as we look at this portion of your word this morning, that God, the Holy Spirit will bless it to each heart, help us to truly understand it, to have it sink deep into the soil of our souls where it can sprout and bear fruit so that we can make the most of the time that remains to us in this life, reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus and live a life in a way that is pleasing in your sight.

We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen. We are drawing to a close here in the study of the book of James. It has been wonderfully helpful for me and I hope it has been for you as well.

We are now in chapter 5, which is the final chapter of the book. We've already covered the first portion of it and we are looking at this final section, which is found in verses 7 through 20. The theme of this book, if you had to try to summarize it, what would you say it is? You've seen most of it as we've looked at it together.

And I think the area of personal walk is central to most scripture, most New Testament scripture certainly that exhorts us and encourages us to live differently, to be different, to not continue in the ways of the world. James is no exception. I think as probably the first of the New Testament books to be written after Pentecost, it is very much connected to and an extension of Old Testament exhortation in this area.

But we've seen James shift his gaze to the problems we have when we have our eyes on ourselves and we're occupied with our own problems. This began in chapter 1 when we are enduring trial or temptation. What is our attitude when it is improper? What are the consequences when we turn to God? What are the resources and the sustaining blessings that come from God? What do we do when we are personally challenged and we're not sure if this is God seeing if we are going to sin? James addressed all that in chapter 1, as you recall.

He also addresses when we look outside ourselves at those in our periphery. How do we treat people? Do we look at them as ways to get ahead, as advantageous or not so much so? How do we treat them? Do we look at them from God's perspective or do we look at them from what can we gain or lose by association? This bears on what will be more fully developed in later years and

later epistles in terms of love. How do we find love in our own soul? Are we sacrificial and beneficial or do we love those who love us? Do we love the world and the ways of the world? So James explores that certainly in chapter 2. We saw, and if you want to sort of annotate these largely in the margins, if you've not already done so, in my Bible, I have chapter 1 labeled subjectivity, eyes on self.

And this extends to how we sit before the Lord. Do we look to Him for wisdom and ask Him, nothing doubting? Or do we blame Him for our problems and say our testing has come from Him? That is, looking at ourselves and either turning independence to the Lord or turning to the Lord with some sort of objection, trying to blame God. He has caused this problem and why did He do that? It's not fair.

So subjectivity, eyes on self, is largely the first part of that chapter. And the turning point that comes in verse 21 requires change of mind and change of practice. Laying aside the things that corrupt us, the things that prevent us from seeing things in the light of God's wisdom, laying aside filthiness, the overflow of wickedness, receiving with humility the implanted word.

This is what is able to deliver our souls. Our souls will remain in the grip of this subjectivity and this antipathy toward God until we acknowledge our problem and allow His word to be the means of fixing it. That is where the remainder of chapter one spends its time.

Be doers of the word, which in our parlance would be apply the word. Put what we've learned into application. So we look into the perfect law of liberty.

We observe ourselves. Do we immediately forget or are we not forgetful hearers but doers of the work? This one will be blessed in what he does. That is the challenge.

It begins looking at ourselves in the light of the presence and power of God and our opportunities and responsibilities before Him. And if there's a problem there, what is the solution? Cultivate humility, lay aside the things that are obstacles to seeing ourselves in a proper light and then receive with humility the implanted word and let it do its work. This is why we're a Bible church.

We recognize that God has chosen to manifest Himself and to enable and empower us to escape from sin, to be delivered. To be delivered, as Galatians 1 says, out of this present evil age. His grace is found in the word, in the hands of the Holy Spirit.

That was chapter one. Chapter two, I have labeled subjectivity, eyes on others. I'm busy trying to cultivate relationships or distance myself from certain ones, depending on whether I perceive it to be beneficial, advantageous, or a relationship that I can leverage in the future.

So that is holding the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ with partiality. Partiality always involves being partial to someone, some other person. And so we turn from this subjectivity, eyes on self, to subjectivity, eyes on others.

There's nothing wrong with having eyes on others. Love requires our eyes to be on others. Intercessory prayer requires it.

Discernment of who to cultivate fellowship with and who to create a little bit of distance from depends on evaluating others. But the unhealthy evaluation, looking at what we can get out of it personally, that's subjectivity. So that began in chapter two and extended verses one through 13.

Then there is a turn in verse 14. What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? This is an advance on the last portion of chapter one, verses 21 through 27. Being a doer of the word involves looking at others, not for what we can get from them, but what we can do for them.

How we can be a channel of blessing. Someone who can benefit by presence, by prayer, by paying attention to needs. So you see this faith that is developed in verses 21 through 27 of chapter one needs to have an expression.

So James talks about that in chapter two, beginning in verse 14 and extending through the end of the chapter. As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. We turn in humility and receive the implanted word.

We in that humility allow it to expose and remedy our faults, our shortcomings, what needs fixing in ourselves. This then equips us to not look at others in a worldly way, but to look at them in a spiritual way. So this is the movement in chapter two that says when it comes to dealing with people, that implanted word needs to be bearing fruit and expressing itself in works.

He anticipated that when he said back in chapter one, be doers of the works, doers of the word. And this is the concrete expression. Faith is working together with works.

So then in chapter three, what did we see? In chapter three, I've labeled this self-control speech, self-control in conversation. We are still interacting with others. We typically are talking, if not to ourselves, to someone in our near periphery.

The three directions we tend to talk, we talk to ourselves, we talk to others, we talk to God. And this focuses on how we talk to others and how we talk about others. We're still in this realm of the second category of subjectivity, which is proper and improper interactions with fellow believers, with those in our periphery.

So, let not many of you become teachers, talking to others and attempting to invade upon their strengths and weaknesses with the word of God. It's a dangerous occupation if it isn't carried out, A, because God has given it as an assignment, B, done in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, having already taken care of a lot of the subjectivity, eyes on self, and subjectivity, wrong views of others. There's something wrong with you, I'm going to fix it, let me beat you over the head with the word of God.

There is great judgment in store when those of us who teach fail in this way. And it is a very sobering and motivating truth to approach the communication of the word of God, which is what teachers is talking about here, with incredible caution and dependence upon God for guidance and for insight. Show me my hidden faults, am I somehow implementing a personal agenda instead of teaching objective truth in an objective way? Great hazard for those who teach.

So let not many of you become teachers. And in a group, this is a group exhortation, if you have a group, you shouldn't have a multiplicity of teachers. There can be more than one, but you shouldn't have many.

There's some groups where anyone can stand up and just start holding forth. And I don't think they've fully understood that what James is talking about here is, in your group, you should identify, pray for, and listen to a few teachers. Let not many of you in the group decide that you've got just as good a point to make as someone who is, in fact, obviously the teacher in the group or teachers.

So let not many of you become. This is both a personal application and an application for the group. All of this is under self-control communication, self-control conversation, self-control speech.

Remember the list of the fruit of the spirit that Paul gives? Fruit of the spirit is love, joy, and peace, and it ends with self-control. Self-control is most fully visible and most strongly expressed in the area of the tongue. And so we all stumble in many things.

If we do not stumble in word, that's a mature person. The toughest one to handle is this communication issue. It is so easy to wound.

It is easy to sin. It is easy to deceive. It is easy to cause someone else harm instead of blessing in our conversational contact.

So in Spanish, they would say, cuidado. In English, we say, be careful. James says, if we have, with humility, received the implanted word, if we have endured testing and conflict, and the testing of our faith has produced patience, and patience has its perfect work, patience means not being impatient with others when we talk to them, being patient in letting them speak their peace, in listening to what they have to say, and evaluating it carefully and not being dismissive and impatiently waiting for the first opening in the conversation to make your next personal point.

Requires humility. It requires incredible self-control, especially if you are not in harmony with what is being said by another person. If it tends to make you defensive, if it inclines you to respond in kind, very hard to be patient.

Patience has to have its perfect work so that we can be perfect. This is its mature work, its complete work, so that we can be mature and complete, lacking nothing when it comes to dealing

with others. The primary way we deal with others is conversation, so the beauty of the flow of this argument is so impressive.

And so when he talks about this, being able to not stumble in word and able to bridle the whole body, this goes back to chapter 1, verse 26. If anyone among you thinks he is religious, but does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Your Christian faith is useless if it does not find mature expression in dealing with fellow believers.

Very convicting, very powerful, very practical and applicable truth, isn't it? This day will not complete before all of us will have an opportunity to apply this, to remember it, and ask God for wisdom to be mature, to bridle our tongue, to not deceive our hearts and cause problems with others. We deceive our heart when we think we are living a quality, meaningful, and fruitful Christian life, and we're really not. So hard to identify self-deception.

If I'm lying to myself, how do I know? Makes perfect sense to me. The objective word of God is the cure for subjectivity in each of these areas. So in chapter 3, under this area of self-control, which will later be identified as one of the culminating aspects of the fruit of the Spirit, self-control, it expresses itself in how we talk, what we say.

This can be our tone. This can be our expression. This can be our attitude.

Are we gracious? Are we flexible? Are we willing to absorb a wrong in the interest of maintaining this objective view? People like to talk about someone being the adult in the room. Where does that expression come from? Who is going to be mature enough to not be dislodged and deflected and spun up and rendered subjective? Objectivity and self-control requires maturity. So in interactions with others, we would hope to be mature.

And in that maturity, we remember that we bridle our tongue, and that's the hardest piece. It's an a fortiori argument. If you can bridle your tongue, the rest of your self-discipline and self-control is going to be easier.

This is the toughest. This is the hardest. So whether it is teachers being one or listening to one, pick a few good teachers and listen to them.

Let not many of you become teachers. The more you spread your net wide in the search for truth, the more there is going to be variation. And confusion.

Ask God for wisdom. Ask God for guidance. If we ask God for bread, remember Jesus talking about asking and seeking and knocking? You, as parents, when your child comes to you and asks you for food, you don't give them a rock, a snake, or a scorpion.

Your heavenly father is a much better father than a human father, and he will not let us be led astray. If we are currently listening to something that isn't helpful, if we are being influenced by those who presume to be teachers, and we go to God and ask for wisdom, chapter one, ask and

seek and knock, God will point out for us what we need to separate from. This thing you're listening to, that's a rock.

This thing over here that you're giving consideration to, that's being piped into your intake manifold, that is a snake. This view, this emphasis, this trend that is coming online, or you have friends or family or others who are going down a particular road, that is a scorpion. Our heavenly father, when we go to him and ask him for wisdom, gives it to us liberally and without rebuke.

Don't need many teachers, but notice it says plural. There can certainly be more than one, but just a few. Find a few good sources, pray over it.

We ask the blessing when we sit down to eat physical food, ask the blessing when we sit down to partake of spiritual food, ask God to bless it to the nourishment of our souls, that this will be wisdom that will truly put the mirror in front of our face and allow us to look into the perfect law of liberty and be transformed, be enabled and empowered. The thrust of the book of James is when subjectivity is happening, eyes on self, eyes on people, this is the answer. This is how to gain objectivity, how to have revealed truth in the forefront of our whole operation.

So practical. So chapter 3 again, self-control in the area of speech. Tongue can be this fire, world of iniquity.

It is so set among our members in verse 6 that it defiles the whole body. Notice the relationship between the tongue and the whole body is repeated here. We had it first in verse 2 and we have it again in verse 6. Notice, if we do not stumble in word, we are a mature man able to bridle our whole body.

If we let the tongue light things on fire, the tongue is so set among our members it defiles the whole body and sets on fire the course of nature and is set on fire by hell. Not a small thing. That's why this is close to the center of the book, the heart of the message.

What are we saying? How are we saying it? Who are we listening to and what are they saying? An individual who is going to speak in the context of believers and their interaction needs to be mature or remain silent and be thought a fool rather than opening our mouth and removing all doubt. That is the first portion of chapter 3. We shouldn't be inconsistent. If you find inconsistency in someone who is purporting to be a teacher or who is recognized by some group as a teacher, back to verse 1, one of the characteristics of a good teacher is consistency.

Consistency can't be a spring that brings forth fresh water one time and salt water the next. You never know what you're going to get when you plunge the dipper in and bring it to your lips. Is this going to be human viewpoint or divine viewpoint? Is it going to be biblical or is it going to be social and economic and international and political? What's it going to be? If it is not consistently drawing us to God through His word and His spirit and the example of the Lord Jesus, watch out.

The inconsistency is the marker. Springs do not send fresh and bitter water from the same opening. Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives or a grapevine bear figs? There is no spring that yields both salt water and fresh.

That's not a spring you want to drink at. Communication, objectivity, availability of the truth that should unite us, grow us, draw us closer together, and survive scrutiny in the presence of the Father. Who is wise and understanding among you in 3.13? This is the introduction to a section on the two kinds of wisdom, natural extension of communication.

Whether we are speaking to each other, whether we are listening to a teacher or endeavoring to be a teacher, what wisdom are we focusing on? There's the wisdom of the world, the ways of the world, the actions and behaviors of the world. We can focus on that. We can wring our hands.

We can throw sweat grenades. We can be critical. We can be judgmental.

What are we to do? Identify the wisdom that is from above. It is characteristic. In the same way that you can tell salty water, it doesn't take very much salt for water to taste salty.

A little leaven can leaven the whole lump. A little bit of corruption can render something unfit. How many bugs do you have to find in the flour before you decide you're not going to bake with it? How many contaminations do you need to find in the water before you decide you're not going to drink it? How many things floating in the punch bowl before it puts you off punch? You can have a vast sea of something, but if you look in the well and there's a dead squirrel floating in it, I don't care how deep the well is or how many gallons are in there, you're not going to want to drink that water.

So what is the answer? We need to know the characteristics of God's wisdom and imbibe that, pursue that, listen to that. And there are serious consequences for failing to do so. So he says here, beginning in 13 and 14, if you have wisdom and understanding, this will show in your good conduct.

You are going to be poor in spirit. You are going to be hungering and thirsting after righteousness. I'm talking about the Beatitudes in Matthew chapter five.

You are going to be peaceable and gentle. You are going to be a peacemaker, not a division and strife agent. And notice again, we have this recurring theme of meekness.

The wisdom of God is humble. It doesn't think it's got all the answers. It is not unwilling to listen because it's got its mind made up.

The old sod, don't bother me with the facts. My mind's made up. Humility is flexible.

Humility will listen and listen carefully and watch for, even if it doesn't change your position, it can certainly inform our position and help us to be more understanding in the implementation and so

on. So two kinds of wisdom. There's wisdom that produces good conduct and the humility that characterizes God's wisdom.

But if it results in bitter envy, if it results in self-seeking, this is working against the truth. It's called boasting because I've got a better idea than God's wisdom. There's no way around identifying the pride, the arrogance that characterizes someone who says, I've got a better way than God's way.

This is going to work out better than what God commands, what God advises, what God encourages in his wisdom. You're boasting if, like Ford, you've got a better idea. That's a few decades back now, but one of their marketing slogans was, Ford has a better idea.

The little light bulb would come on. We're not Ford. We don't have a better idea.

And if we think we do, it's boasting and lying against the truth. And in many cases, we lie to ourselves first before we start lying to others. So, a characteristic, how do we identify the wisdom that is earthly or the wisdom that is from above? The wisdom that causes envy and self-seeking and my way or the highway, that's not it.

This wisdom is not from above. In verse 15, it is earthly, sensual, and demonic. We looked at those three terms in detail.

The wisdom from above is identifiable. It is pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Back to chapter two, this wisdom will not result in mistreatment of the poor or mistreatment of the rich, favoritism, cultivation of relationship for personal advantage.

People like to get next to rich people, hoping that some of that rich will rub off or the person will give them a gift or leave them something in their will. That enormous treasure attracts people who think that's a key to success and happiness. And woe to the rich on many fronts, but not the least of which is, it's hard to know who your real friends are because so many of them are after what you've got.

Just like a pretty girl has to be careful to sort out the nature of the attention that is being paid. Is it sincere? Is it genuine? Does it look past the superficial? Or is it superficial and only interested in self-gratification? Pure, in verse 17 of chapter three, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

This is a beautiful symmetry with verse one, let not many of you become teachers. The teaching of the word of God, when it is focused on the content of God's wisdom, the genuine word of God, properly understood, properly interpreted, exhortation to proper application. What is the result? Teachers who teach properly sow peace.

The word of God that is sown is going to result in peace. How do you know if you are listening to

the word of God and being exposed to the wisdom of God in answer to your prayers, asking for it, the result will be peace. Be sure and put out next to chapter three, verse 18, chapter three, verse one.

Let not many of you become teachers. The ones who are teachers should be presenting the wisdom of God in a way that sows peace, not division, not strife, not backbiting, not judging, not calling out the faults and sins of others, not raising itself. I've told you in the past that during my training as an English major, the movement in literature is often between two characters.

There's the protagonist and the antagonist, and one rises as the other falls. Initially, you see Haman, and he's advancing himself, and Esther and Mordecai and the Jews are on the way down. And they call this the well bucket analogy.

If you've ever been around a well that has two buckets, there's a big advantage in having two buckets because you have some counterweight there. So you have a pulley at the top, and as you descend one bucket down to get more water, the full bucket rises. And once you dump the water out of that, there's a latch at the top, it releases the valve at the bottom, it's a long tubular bucket.

People like to think of these little wooden buckets, wooden buckets don't work, they float. What you want is a tubular steel bucket with a valve and a long rod and a loop at the top. You run that bucket down into the water, the good, sweet, fresh well water, and when it is full, the other bucket is at the top.

You may have already emptied it, then you send that emptied bucket down and you bring the full bucket up. So one rises as the other falls, and they are connected by a rope that makes this a mechanical fact. One rises as the other falls.

This is the way of the world. I will cultivate relationships so that I rise, and if it's at the expense of others, so be it. The peace is the opposite.

The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. Goes back to verse 1. That brings us to chapter 4. What did we learn in chapter 4? You have subjectivity, eyes on self, returning. Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires? Your desire for pleasure, and it creates wars among your members.

Members of the group is what is really being spoken of here. And this is going to continue in chapter 4. So as we go to the break, what are we really looking at here? This is some of the most practical wisdom from God. The very wisdom that one would go to God and ask for, James is giving it.

He is one of 12 messengers. Let not many of you become teachers, but Jesus told his disciples, you are my witnesses. Teach them to observe the things that I have commanded you to teach,

teaching them to observe all things.

Whatever I've commanded you to teach, teach that. It comes from the Lord Jesus. That's what James is doing here.

So valuable and so practical. Our enemy is subjectivity. It deceives us.

It deflects us from the truth. This is the antidote. How to identify it, how to fix it.

Doesn't get any better than that. Well, let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll pick up at chapter 4, move into our current passage in chapter 5.