

JAMES

Authentic Christianity

in the Home Group [The Church]

The NLT and KJV refined by AA

4-11-17

[the family has read this book in devotions]

CHAPTER ONE

This letter is from James, a voluntary servant-for-life of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am writing to the “twelve tribes”—Jewish believers, scattered abroad, meeting together in each other’s homes.

Greetings!

The Benefit of Testing

2 Dear brothers and sisters, when testing of any kind comes your way, consider it to be a supreme joy. 3 For it is when your **faith** is tested that your spiritual strength and perseverance has a chance to grow. 4 So let it grow, for when you have the kind of faith that can endure under pressure, you will be spiritually mature and completely equipped - all grown up.

Staying in Faith

5 When you don't know what to do or which way to turn when undergoing a testing, continue to ask our generous God for His help and He will guide you — He loves it when you lean on Him! 6 But when you ask him, be sure to ask *in faith* [believing that God is hearing you, that He loves you, that He *can* do, *wants* to do, *will* do what you are asking . . . in fact, that your request is already granted.] Stand strong in faith; don't let doubts and fears take over. It takes real effort to exercise steady, firm faith — to stay calm in the Lord, rather than to worry and be anxious, like a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. 7 But God responds to faith, not unbelief. People who do not stay in faith should not expect to have very many prayers answered. 8 Their hot-then-cold, back-and-forth Christianity keeps them from becoming strong Christians; their entire lives are filled with indecision and weakness.

Jesus is our Joy

9 Whether God has blessed us with a lot or a little, we Christians know that our true cause of happiness is Jesus Christ. Poor Christians rejoice in how rich they are in Christ. 10 Wealthy Christians rejoice that God has corrected their focus from themselves and their wealth, to Christ and the riches of His grace. He has shown them that their lives — despite their wealth and influence — will not last forever; they are no more enduring than a blossom 11 that looks beautiful, at first, but soon droops, fades, and falls. They know that the same thing will happen to them - no matter how much they have or what they do. So, they rejoice in Christ.

Temptations aren't from God

12 God blesses those who patiently endure and outlast testings, temptations, and stress. These things are necessary in order for us to acquire the mature, victorious Christian life God has promised to those who love him enough to trust Him through these things. 13 And remember — whenever you experience an urge to sin, to fail a testing — not to think God is tempting you, because God is never tempted to sin, and he never tempts anyone else to sin, either.

14 Temptation to engage in sinful behavior comes from our own sinful nature which lures us away from our husband, Jesus Christ, and entices us to commit adultery with itself. 15 Yielding to our sinful nature is how sin is conceived in our minds and hearts. It is easy to love and enjoy our sins, but whenever a sin is born in our lives, and we cherish it and help it mature, it always turns around and stabs us. 16. So, keep this in mind, dear brothers and sisters.

Our Dependably Good Father

17 We can always tell when something is from our Father, God, because it will always be good and lovely — beautiful instead of ugly; light, instead of darkness.

We can always count on our Father to bless us. 18 He couldn't wait for us to be born into His family by believing the Good News of His Son, and to make us His prized possession of all that He created.

The Effect of Heeding God's Word

19 This is important, my dear brothers and sisters: Let each one of us be great listeners, slow to say anything,

and *very* slow to say anything in anger. 20 Our human anger is not God's way to advance the Kingdom of God. It will usually do just the opposite. 21 Instead, we need to pull all the ungodly and sinful weeds out of our lives, and humbly and patiently cultivate the truth from God's Word He has planted in our hearts, for God's Word has the power to save our souls and straighten out our lives.

22 But let us not just read God's word, or listen week after week to good Bible messages. We must apply God's Word to our lives! Otherwise, we are only fooling ourselves. 23 For if we hear the Word of God but don't obey it and apply it to our lives, it is like glancing carelessly at our dirty faces in a mirror. 24 We catch a glimpse of ourself, but then walk away, ignoring the fact that we need to wash up. 25 But when we look carefully into the perfect mirror of God's Word that reveals our flaws, and don't ignore what we "see" in it, but heed what it says, and apply it to our lives, then God will bring us into alignment with Him and free us from every kind of dirtiness and sinful bondage.

26 So, for instance, when we claim to be good Christians but don't allow the Lord to control our tongues, we are fooling ourselves, and our "christianity" is worthless.

27 Instead, if you want authentic Christianity, a 'religion' that is pure in God's eyes, help those who are truly needy - like orphans and widows, and absolutely refuse to imitate this corrupt world.

James 2

Everybody is Equal, in Christ

My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to understand the Gospel if you treat some people better than others?

2 For example, suppose someone comes to your house-church meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes who is poor and dressed in old, dirty clothes. 3 If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, "You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor"—well, 4 doesn't this discrimination show that both your perspective and motives are wrong?

5 Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters: Hasn't God chosen *the poor* in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't *they* the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him? 6 So why are you dishonoring the poor? Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? 7 Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear?

We Live by The Law of Love

8 If you obey the royal law of the Old Testament, "Love your neighbor as yourself," that is good. 9 But if you favor some people over others, you are breaking that law, and are sinning.

10 And when the person whose goal is to live by the Old Testament Law breaks just one of those laws, he has failed to live by the Old Testament Law. 11 For the same God who said, "You must not commit adultery," also said, "You must not murder." So if you murder someone but do

not commit adultery, you have still broken God's Old Testament Law.

12 But, as Christians, everything we say and do is to be motivated by — and someday shall be judged by — the new law of The-Life-of-Jesus, the Law of Love — the Law of the Messiah that frees from the Law of Moses.

13 God's judgement will be just as merciless toward anyone who judges others according to Old Testament Law as the Law, itself is. Living by God's new Law of Love is a far better way to treat others and be treated.

Authentic Christianity is Obvious

14 What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you are a Christian but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of "christianity" help anyone? 15 Suppose you see someone who has no food or clothing, 16 and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

17 In the same way, words without action aren't enough. Unless one's Christianity produces good deeds, it is a false "christianity" and is useless.

18 Now someone may argue, "I am a Christian but I don't show it like others do." But I say, "How can you claim to be a Christian if your life doesn't demonstrate it? The fact that I am a Christian is obvious by the way I live."

[NOTE: "Taking God's name in vain" means exactly this: calling yourself a Christian, but not acting like one.]

19 You say the proof that you are a Christian is that you believe in God. That sounds good, but even the demons believe this — and their belief in God causes them to, at least, tremble in terror. 20 Don't kid yourself: a workless faith is a worthless faith. If you really believe in God it will show in the way you live.

21 Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see, his faith and his actions complimented each other. His actions were the proof of his faith. 23 And that is why the Bible says: "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." God even called him his friend. 24 So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not just by what we claim to believe.

25 Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. 26 Just as a body is dead unless it is breathing, so also any "christianity" is dead that isn't characterized by godly actions.

James 3

A Primary Criterion for Leadership

Dear brothers and sisters, do not press yourselves into the role of teaching, for church teachers and leaders are held to a higher standard of accountability.

2 All of us will stumble, from time to time, but one of the marks of spiritual maturity is being able to control what

we say and how we say it. Whoever is able to control his small tongue, is able to control the *rest* of his body.

3 For instance, we make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. 4 And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong.

5 Our tongue is a small thing in relation to the human body, but it can cause great harm - just like a tiny spark can start a great forest fire.

6 And the tongue is like a spark to the rest of our body [the Church Body]. It is like a little virus, sickening our entire body. Our tongue can burn down our entire life, when we allow satan to fill it with hellfire.

7 People have captured and tamed all kinds of mammals, birds, reptiles, and fish, 8 but none of them are as difficult to tame as our tongue! It is like a vicious viper, full of deadly poison.

9 With one breath it praises our Lord and Father, and with the next breath it curses people — who are made in the very image of God! 10 And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth! Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! *[Note: Another example is speaking faith and speaking doubt from the same mouth.]* 11 Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and salt water? 12 Does a fig tree produce olives? or a grapevine produce figs? No, and neither will Spirit-controlled tongues pour out both fresh and salty 'water'.

Qualified, Wise, Leadership

13 If you truly are wise enough and understand God's ways enough to teach others, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from true wisdom. 14 But if your desire to teach comes from bitter jealousy and selfish ambition, don't think you can hide it with an eloquent and bragging tongue. 15 Jealousy and selfishness are not God's heavenly kind of wisdom. No, they are from the world, the flesh, and the devil. 16 And those who manage to become church leaders out of jealousy and selfish ambition will produce only disorder and offenses of every kind.

17 The kind of wisdom you need in your leaders and teachers doesn't occur naturally on this earth; it comes from God above, and is first of all pure. It is also peace-loving, gentle at all times, and gracious toward others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is not hypocritical. 18 Leaders like these will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.

James 4

The Effects of Envy toward Leadership

As a house church, what is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the sinful, proud, self-seeking passion some of you have to be leaders? 2 You aren't content with who you are, so you scheme and assassinate others' character to make yourselves seem greater than you are. You are jealous of the esteem others have, but you can't get it, so you bicker and backstab to take it away from them. Still you

don't get what you want because you aren't serious enough about it to seek God for it.

[2-1-18 Note: Many times, we have a need, but we forget to ask God about it. All we have to do to have something we need is to ask our Father for it. All we have to do is ask.]

3 And even when you do pray about becoming a leader, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you're only concerned about looking good in the world's eyes.

4 That makes you guilty of committing adultery with the world! And don't you realize that being an ally of this world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: Being a friend of the world makes you an enemy of God! 5 Do you think God is kidding when He says the Holy Spirit within us is very serious about our faithfulness to God!

6 But God is gracious toward us. And as the Scriptures say,

"God works against the proud

but gives help [grace] to the humble."

[NOTE: If anyone wants more grace, all he has to do is get closer to God - (Eph.6:24), i.e.: If anyone is cold, all he has to do is get closer to the wood stove.]

7 So, humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Get closer to God, and God will get closer to you. *[NOTE: like getting closer to a hot wood stove. The closer we get to the stove, the more it*

heats us up.] Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts — for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. 9 Let there be tears for the way you have been acting. Let there be true sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and remorse instead of joy. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and then He will give you the honor you seek.

A Critical Spirit

11 Don't backbite and mean-mouth each other, dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize and condemn each other, then you are setting yourselves up as being lawyers and judges of God's law. But your job is to obey God, yourself, not to judge whether others are obeying Him. 12 God, alone, is the Judge. He is the only one with the ability and authority to pass judgment on others. Who do you think you are to be judging and condemning anybody else?

God-less Planning

13 And here's a word for those of you who say, "Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit." 14 How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning mists—it's here a little while, then it's gone. 15 What you ought to say is, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." 16 Otherwise you are boasting about your own pretentious plans, and all such boasting is evil.

17 Remember: If these things I have said are revealing any dirt on your faces, it is sin to ignore it.

James 5

The Folly of Trusting in Ourselves and Our Wealth

Look here, you wealthy people who are smug in your wealthiness and deferential treatment, and are not truly saved: You'd do much better to be weeping and groaning in distress over all the terrible troubles ahead of you. 2 You can see, yourselves, that your wealth is deteriorating before your eyes. Your heirlooms are wearing out; your expensive clothes are fading. 3 Your gold and silver are corroding. The very wealth you were counting on to save you will be the death of you. This perishing treasure you have hoarded will testify against you on the day of judgment. 4 For listen! Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay. The cries of those who harvest your fields have reached the ears of the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

5 By spending your years on earth in luxury, satisfying your every desire, all you have done is fatten yourselves for the day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned, taken advantage of, and killed innocent people, and, so far, have gotten away with it. But Pay Day is coming!

Waiting Patiently for Christ's Return

7 Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in the spring and in the fall, even though they are so eager for the valuable harvest. 8 You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near.

9 Don't grumble against others in your home group, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged for it. And, remember— the Judge is almost here!

10 If you need encouragement to be patient in poverty and suffering, dear brothers and sisters, just think about the Old Testament prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 Think of how happy they are now because they stayed true to him then, even though they suffered greatly for it. For instance, you know about Job, a man who suffered greatly. You know how richly the Lord rewarded him at the end; and the Lord will show the same tenderness and mercy toward you.

Don't Vow Anything!

12 It is very important, my brothers and sisters, never to vow anything by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no — in case you cannot do what you vowed to do and your reputation is ruined.

Authentic Christianity in the House Church

13 When any of you suffer hardships, pray to the Lord about it.

When any of you are happy, sing songs of praise to the Lord.

14 When any of you are sick because of some sin in your life, call for the elders of the church to come to your house so they can talk with you, counsel you, and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 Such a prayer offered by faithful elders will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if your illness

is the result of sins you have committed, you will be forgiven. 16 Confessing your trespasses to one another and praying for one another in this way is how to stay healthy - individually and as a group.

The sincere prayers of righteous people on behalf of others have great power and produce wonderful results.

17 For instance, Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years! 18 Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops.

19 My dear friends, if any of you wanders away from Christian doctrine or policy, and someone restores you to alignment with God and fellowship with the home church, 20 you can be sure that he will have rescued the person from premature death and will take advantage of the atonement for sins - no matter how many.