

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY IN THE BOOK OF JAMES – PART FIVE

From the misuse of the tongue by one person, particularly a teacher, James moves on to the result of more than one tongue doing the same, resulting in arguments and conflict. Just as murder can begin with the attitude of hatred in the heart, so does conflict whether expressed physically or verbally. Again the problem starts because we did not ask for God's wisdom, or we asked for the wrong reason and so were 'double-minded'.(1:5-8) We have to make a choice between God's wisdom and the world's. To hover between is to be a 'spiritual adulteress'. Christ as our 'husband',(Eph.5:22-33) is understandably jealous when He sees His church's unfaithfulness to His Spirit who lives inside us.(4:1-5)

Despite our unfaithfulness to Him at times, He shows His love to us by overwhelming grace. He gives and gives and gives! But only to those who are willing to receive, who admit that of ourselves we are nothing and can do nothing.(Jn.15:5) Pride was the Devil's problem when he rebelled against God,(Isa.14:12-15) and pride was what he persuaded Eve and then Adam to have in believing that they could be wise without God.(Gen.3:1-6) Humility accepts God's grace, submits to Him and refuses the Devil's lie so that he has no choice but to leave us alone for the moment.(Lk.4:13) When we depend on His wisdom alone, the first consequence is forgiveness which results in a pure way of thinking and a clean way of doing. The realization of the folly of our own wisdom should bring us to repentant tears instead of the laughter of self satisfaction and mockery of others. But as we start in humility to discover His wisdom again, the smile of true joy will spread across our lives once more.(4:6-10)

One of the most deadly evidences of the tongue without God is in our judgement of others. Again it springs from pride as we falsely believe we have done better than the one we drag into the court of our condemnation. The basis of our judgement lies in the laws of our own making, not the Law of God. To Him all sin is equal because it is in the heart of unbelief, and all have sinned.(Rom.3:23; 14:23; Jn.16:8,9) If we grade sin and so score ourselves above others, these are our laws, not God's. Only the Lawmaker can appoint a judge. When we appoint ourselves judges of our neighbours we have taken over God's role. That is treason! Jesus pointed out that the first qualification of a judge must be that he or she is without fault,(Matt.7:1-5) otherwise we will have committed the crime of being a corrupt judge. Paul reminded us,(Rom.2:1-3) that the judgements we are so eager to make on others are usually in the very areas in which we also offend, if only in our thinking.(4:11-12)

The chapter ends with a challenge which seems right out of place in our modern capitalist societies. What is wrong with planning a business trip to make a profit? Surely our whole economies depend on such entrepreneurs? James' first concern in this section is with our arrogance, another misuse of the tongue without the wisdom of God. How do we know what the next year will bring, or even the next 24 hours? God's wisdom begins with the recognition that He alone knows the future and that we can trust Him with every moment. Modern business methods demand that we make Strategic Plans for our enterprises. Do we discard all that worldly theory and just trust God? We can assume

that when Jesus took over His father's carpentry business He had to make plans to buy wood for the next task and that to do so He needed to have the means to pay the bill. The profit from the business was what fed His mother, brothers and sisters. James had witnessed all this and benefited from it. He was not against hard work, honest trading and a fair profit to support a family. But when Jesus, helped by His younger brothers worked on a building or were making furniture, their motives were not primarily profit but to show the glory of God by the best workmanship, a kind attitude to those they served and each other, and absolute honesty.

A large part of the suffering of the poor worldwide springs from the motive of profit above all, regardless of inadequate pay to struggling workers, social benefit to the needy in that society, or damage to the environment for which the Creator made us responsible.(4:13-17)

QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER FIVE

1. What will be the consequences on earth for the rich? How does what James says here actually happen in practice? What will be the consequences in eternity? Why is God so tough on the rich? How can this passage be reconciled with the teaching that trusting God will lead to earthly prosperity?(5:1-3)
2. What practical examples does James give of how the rich misuse the power which money gives them? What three questions should we ask ourselves when we find we have more assets than before? How will answering these questions honestly affect our care of the needy? How had the attitude of the rich led to the death of James' older brother, Jesus?(5:4-6)
3. What quality will result from God's wisdom which will replace our search for riches? What practical example does James use of this quality being applied in life? What will God's wisdom make our priority instead of material growth?(Matt.6:19-24) To what behaviour does the love of money lead? How does James show our motive in judgement? Why is it so inappropriate?(5:7-9)
4. How did the life of Job illustrate a healthy attitude to money?(Job 1:21-22) Didn't he begin rich and end up rich after God had dealt with him? How can we reconcile this with James' warning to the rich in verse 1?(5:10,11)
5. With what simple principle does James complete his warnings to the rich? Why would this approach make such a difference to the misuse of wealth? What light does this verse cast on Jesus' teaching,(Matt.5:33-37) and Paul's urging,(II Cor.1:18-22) on the same issue?(5:12)
6. To what three situations in our lives does James now refer? Given that the word 'sick' in Greek means 'weak', to what different kinds of weakness should this relate in the light of the teaching in the last several chapters? What is to be the role of elders when someone 'weak' comes for help? Give examples of how this is effective. What is to be the most important consequence for the 'weak' person? What encouragement are we given here about prayer? Why was Elijah such a good example of James' teaching?(5:12-18)
7. How do the final 2 verses sum up the use of wisdom in helping the 'weak'?(5:19-20)