

5445U

GOSNELL'S SPECIAL EFFORT - 1996

JAMES THE JUST

Speaker: Bro. Roger Lewis

Study #8: Teacher of Wisdom (Exhortation)

Reading: James 3: 1-18

Thank you brother chairman, my dear brethren and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well then, by way of exhortation this day, we come to the conclusion of our studies concerning James the Just, and the story of the Jerusalem ecclesia. We have found, haven't we? how those two stories are very much bound together. That every critical moment in the history of the Jerusalem ecclesia, we find James present at that moment of crisis; every episode in which the ecclesia either developed or struggled, James is there at those moments of its history, so inextricably bound is his life, and his story, with the story of this ecclesia. We remember how that what we've seen is an ecclesia which began so well, that commenced with such a marvellous spirit of unity, and that ended unfortunately in the tragedy of ecclesial schism, and ultimately of division; eaten out by a spirit which indeed, destroyed the very vitals of the ecclesia itself, the spirit of Judaism, as found in the circumcision party within the Jerusalem ecclesia.

Now, b&s, the principle of Judaism is an **extreme**, and there is another extreme, the other extreme, of course, in life is that of **liberalism**. Both the spirit of Judaism and the spirit of liberalism are not of the truth but of the flesh, they are both extremes! There are two fundamental human psyches, as it were, that were the Epicureans and the Stoics; we have hawks and doves, we have liberals and conservatives, and in the very persuasion of life, even within the generality of mankind, there are those with a disposition towards the liberal, and those with a leaning towards the conservative, and I think, you see, that we all have a tendency to drift one way or the other, based on our own personality and our own characteristics, it's the way we are, it's the way we're made! Everyone of us has a background that is partly shaped by hereditary circumstances, partly affected by the environment we have come from, partly related to the characteristics of our own person, partly shaped by the experiences of life that we have come through, and all of those things tend to give us, a direction one way or the other. What's important to realize is that neither of those are the spirit of the truth; they're both actually of the flesh, they both promote self, the one through the subtle principle of justification by works, through personal righteousness, by means of law keeping. The other by seeking self satisfaction through self indulgence, and yet for all of that, we find that the warnings in scripture concerning **liberalism**, are far less than the scriptural material that exhorts us against the dangers of **Judaism**. Did you notice that? there's far, far more scriptural writing on the dangers of Judaism than there ever is, on

the dangers of liberalism. You see, I think part of the reason for that is that liberalism in a sense is easy to recognize, isn't it? That spirit of casualness, that spirit of becoming more worldly in our thinking, in our behaviour, in our language, in our activities, in our conduct; the greater pleasure we begin to find and to have and enjoy in those things out of the ecclesia, out of the circle of the truth, becomes evident to all. It's not difficult to recognize the spirit of liberalism at work within our midst. But it is much more difficult to discern Judaism! because you see, Judaism has this great feature about it, that it has the ability to cloak itself with **the appearance of piety and with the look of righteousness**; to make people believe that there is a standing for the truth and a being **strong** in the truth, whereas in fact, it might actually be of the flesh.

When we saw the final division of the Jerusalem ecclesia, we made note of the fact, that the spirit of Judaism eventually found itself, found its way into the Muslim belief; but from the other ecclesias of the ecclesial world, the spirit of Judaism finally found its way into Catholicism. Two of the great religions that enthralled the majority of mankind within their grip, the vice of Muslim and the fetter of Catholicism were both born out of the spirit of Judaism that found their way into those two great untrue religions. That's the spirit that we've been looking at in the context of these studies.

So how do we recognize then, the spirit of Judaism in our midst? It's not always easy to see it, you see, but eventually because it is secretly advancing the flesh, we'll eventually find it in the method used and in the approach that's used. The flaw lies in the **approach!** because those that are subject to the spirit of Judaism, despite all their protestations that they are truly advancing the cause of the truth, the approach tells us that maybe they're not! James fought against that approach all his life! when he quietly watched Peter giving gentle and patient counsel in Acts 11, when he sought to have that harmonious meeting of accord with the apostle Paul on the matters of justification by faith; when he learnt to become the father of the ecclesia in Acts 12; as he rose to be chairman of the conference in Acts 15 and sought from both sides, that spirit of forbearance that would at least in the meantime, bind the ecclesia together while further growth and development could occur. As he sought to defuse the tension in Acts 21, James was a man who fought all his life against this spirit; and finally, the sheer power of the appeal of Judaism swept James aside, and all his labours were unsuccessful in resisting the advance of this party! Does that make James wrong? Does that mean his approach was incorrect? Of course not! brethren and sisters, should he not have been patient and kind and wise and forbearing and caring and temperate and long suffering? Yes, of course he should have been! because that is the spirit of the truth. The fact that he wasn't successful in saving all the members of the ecclesia, and that some were lost and that some left, it doesn't make James' approach wrong, it simply serves to illustrate **the deadly force** that this mode of thinking has upon those that succumb to it!

Now you'll remember what the apostle Paul's advice was, his advice was that 'we ought to follow the faith and the teaching of James'. Remember, in his final salute, in the epistle to the Hebrews, 'remember your former leaders', he cries, 'whose faith

follow; those you have spoken unto you the Word of God', and so, b&s, that's just what we're going to do now, we're going to go back to James the epistle, and we're going to have a look at what James has to teach us concerning the antidote to Judaism, and that right approach that will help us to avoid this spirit manifesting itself in the ecclesia. Now a number of you might have in front of you a copy of an overhead that was used in the course of these studies; we're going to make reference to it now in the course of the following remarks. You'll remember that we drew attention to the primary characteristics of that spirit as it is revealed in the scriptures, and what we're going to do now, God willing, by way of exhortation, is to go back to the words of James and to try and find the antidote to everyone of those things that were accursed upon the ecclesia in the form of the circumcision party, and we're going to come therefore to the epistle of James.

It's an unusual epistle, by the way, b&s, it's an unusual writing is the epistle of James; it's a letter of pure eloquent, elegant Greek but it's mixed with all the earnestness and colourful expression of the Hebrew prophet. It's an epistle that's imbued with the teaching of the Law, and yet it's major themes are love and peace and mutual respect. It's an epistle written by a man who was stern in his own personal devotion to holiness, yet who was kind and compassionate in helping others in their own walk in the truth. It's a letter in which the Lord's name is only mentioned twice, in which the gospel is mentioned not at all, nor the work of redemption, nor the work of atonement in Christ; never to be found in this letter and yet, for all of that, it's full of warm practical advice on living the truth. Of all the Old Testament passages that the apostle James draws on and draws on frequently, one particular book seems to stand out, and that is that of the book of Proverbs; he makes substantial allusion to a number of other bible books, but Proverbs is one of his favourites. Because Proverbs, b&s, is the book of practical wisdom for living the truth according to its true spirit! That's what James was concerned with and concerned about!

Now you'll remember that we said therefore (using that overhead as the basis now) that the spirit of the circumcision party was a **spirit of dogmatism**; those who were combative and those who were confrontational. That's not what James says! come and have a look at James 5 verses 19 and 20, this was the spirit of James in contrast to that approach: those who feel because they have an issue that they feel strongly on, that they have the right to be at their most aggressive selves in promoting their own cause; that's not what James says, James says in chapter 5 verse 19, 'Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins'. You know, there are three principles, b&s, in those verses that we ought to take note of, first of all, that the overall spirit that James promulgates is that of **gentle recovery**; gentle recovery. When the apostle Paul alludes to this in Galatians 6 verse 1 he adds another term which I think he draws from the spirit of James, Paul says, 'If any of you be overtaken in a fault, let him restore such a one, in a **spirit of meekness**',

says Paul, remember those words? Galatians 6 verse 1, 'in the spirit of meekness' and that's the tone of James here, isn't it? in James 5 verses 19 and 20, and finally in a spirit of **cooperation** says James; not confrontation, **cooperation**. We call to one another to help one another in a cooperative spirit not in a confrontational spirit; that was James' approach.

The **tone** of the circumcision party was to be vociferous, to be assertive, to be zealous in whatever one said, but that's not what James says in chapter 1 and verses 19 to 21, the very opposite of that tone. Those that sometimes and frequently are to be found in the minority and yet the very strident noise of their argument, would give you to feel that they are in the majority when such is not the case. Well, James' spirit was quite the opposite, wasn't it? James 1 verse 19, 'Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to **hear**, slow to **speak**, slow to **wrath**: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore, lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls'. So the first thing that James says is, verse 19, 'don't be **vociferous**, learn how to listen'; you know, b&s, many controversies that occur in ecclesial life is because brethren and sisters have not learnt the art of listening! Sometimes it's imagined that listening means that it's purely the pause of breath in between two of your argumentative points, where the person has the chance to say a few words. You allow him to say those few words purely while you're gathering breath, you haven't really heard any of them, because you're busy marshalling the next point that you wish to raise. You've never heard them at all, and it's like the tower of Babel, it's two men talking and they don't understand one another. James says 'learn to listen', if you really want to solve problems, learn first to **listen**.

Secondly, he says, verse 19, 'slow to speak, slow to wrath', what James exhorts us to is to **restraint** and **forbearance** in our language. It doesn't matter how passionate we feel, b&s, we must never be intemperate with our language; 'that brother's a liar', we ought not to speak like that! In addition to that, James says, verse 20, 'For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God', in other words, James says learn to control your **emotions**! in fact, what he really says in this verse is, doesn't he? he is really saying in this verse is that what we've got to learn is that anger, the anger of the flesh does not best advance the Father's purpose! The wrath of man never ever works the righteousness of God; so learn to listen, learn restraint and forbearance of language and learn to control your emotions, says James.

The attitude of the circumcision party was to be **judgmental**, to be **negative**, and to be **legalistic**. Sometimes those judgments that take place in ecclesial life are what we might call prejudgments, and I know of situations where brethren have come together for a meeting and there's a matter of controversy to be raised, and from the tone that's adopted and the words that are said, it's quite clear that certain brethren have been prejudged, and prehung by the sound of things before the matter has even been

properly discussed. Negative and legalistic, that critical spirit that seeks to find fault! well, that's not what James says in James 4 verses 10 to 12, this is what James says we ought to do! 'Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up. Speak not evil one of another, brethren, he that speaketh evil of his brother and judges his brother, speaketh evil of the Law and judgeth the Law. But if thou judge the Law, thou art not a doer of the Law but a judge; there is one Lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy. Who art thou that judgeth another?' and the lesson of James was firstly, that you should learn to avoid the spirit of censoriousness, that attitude that makes us go around judging others. We could learn to avoid the censoriousness spirit that is so easily found in the party of Judaism.

Secondly, says James, we should learn verse 11, to desist from speaking evil of others. Learn to stop that practice, says James, **speaking evil of others**, oh, how many things come under that banner? And finally says James, verse 10, 'develop that spirit of humility'. It's far harder to be judgmental of others, b&s, when you've finally got to grips with the fact that you do have failings of your own. You know, one of the most remarkable things that has been my experience to observe amongst those who are critical in ecclesial life, a strange perversity of the flesh, is that those who are the **strongest critics** are in fact, the least able to receive criticism. It's one of the great weaknesses of the flesh, but those who are the most powerful critics of others, are the least able to accept anything however small offered by way of criticism concerning their own ability or their own stand. Don't be like that says James, learn **humility**.

The **reasoning** of the circumcision was **unbending, inflexible, unyielding**. Their rule was never to change, never to give in; well, that's not what James says, in James 2 verse 10 to 13. James says we ought to have a different spirit to that altogether! In chapter 2 he says, 'For whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the Law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy. **Mercy**, says James, rejoiceth against judgment'. So the first thing James says is, learn to recognize your own personal inconsistencies in life before you become too unbending toward others. We all have failures, he says, you might be right in one point, but a breaker of the Law in another; and the second thing he reminds the brethren of is, verse 12, don't ever forget that there is coming a day of personal judgment for all of us, and then we've all got to give account of what we've done and how we've done it. You know, one of the most frightening passages in the bible is, 'forgive us our trespasses, **even as we forgive them**, that trespass against us. What the Lord said, you see, in the Lord's prayer was, that the measure of Yahweh's forgiveness to us in that day of account, will be measured in its breadth and in its extent by the spirit of forgiveness we've shown to others. That's a frightening thought, isn't it, b&s? Finally, James says in these particular verses, learn, verse 13, learn to understand that mercy rejoices against judgment, and if

you don't understand that, says James, then you better go away and have another look at the character of the Father. Isn't it interesting, that of all the men who should write this, it's James, the champion of the Law, but he who practiced the Law in every aspect of his life, he it is that says, **mercy rejoices against judgment**, now go ye and learn what that meaneth, says James.

We know that the influence of the circumcision party was **divisive, disruptive, destructive**, we've seen from the fruits of the circumcision party as they left the Jerusalem ecclesia, how that the fruits of that style are inevitably smaller and smaller groups, which become, of course, increasingly more righteous as their numbers diminish; that's not what James said in chapter 3 verses 14 to 18. James says, 'if ye now have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descends not but from above but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace'. And so instead of being divisive and disruptive, and destructive, James says three things, verse 17, first, learn to focus on the clarity of scriptural principle, the wisdom that is from above is first **pure**; secondly, he says, learn to manifest the art of **entreaty and appeal**, learn to manifest the art of entreaty and appeal. Finally, he says in verse 18, apply the spirit that unites in **peace**, learn to find that spirit. Now, b&s, this is not the peace of compromise, this is not the peace 'of at any price', this is not the peace of ignorance, **this is the peace of wisdom**, that unites hearts to the glory of Yahweh's purpose and the fulfilling of His will. Go and learn that spirit, says James.

The behaviour of the circumcision party was **inconsistent**; inconsistent because the very people that were critical of others would inevitably find that they were manifesting the same sins, the same faults, the same failings, in their own lives. They were **biased**, they were **hypocritical**, they were **blind**, to their own inconsistencies; James says this in chapter 5 verses 16 and 17, he says that's not the spirit of the truth, that's not what we need to do. James says, 'Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elijah 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 for by the space of three years and six months'. So the first thing that James says is, learn **to confess your** own faults; now by the way, when he says that in verse 16, he doesn't really mean that we need to run around saying to all and sundry in the ecclesial world what our private sins are; that wouldn't do anyone any good! He's not recommending that! What he is saying though is that in ecclesial life we all have need of one another, and there are those to whom we must needs turn to, for help and for guidance; and in the course of that, we may well confess sin. Well, says James, 'you ought to learn to do that, it will help you to avoid being inconsistent in your judgment of others'. The second thing is,

verse 16, learn to ask for forgiveness, 'pray that you might be healed', but the healing is that of the forgiving of sins, verse 15, learn to ask for forgiveness, and finally says James, verse 16, learn to pray for one another; learn to pray for one another.

How often do we pray for one another and particularly, b&s, have you ever experienced that in a time of crisis or controversy? So imagine a passionate meeting in the ecclesia, where some cause is about to be debated, and there is this group and that group, imagine giving a prayer for the other group before you begin! You see, it's very hard to criticize others when you've just prayed for them, isn't it? so the spirit of prayer in the ecclesia for one another is a spirit that will help to avoid **inconsistency and hypocrisy and criticism of them.**

The spirit of the circumcision party was to be, in fact, **arrogant and proud and self righteous.** In fact, that's the whole problem, you see, of their spirit is that, it is self centred in every way! it's a manifestation of the thinking of the flesh. James says, that's not the right spirit at all! James 4 verses 6 to 8 he says this, he says there is no room for pride and for self righteousness and for arrogance in the truth, says James, chapter 4 verse 6, 'But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you'. So the first thing he says is to learn, verse 7, to submit to God, that's a great antidote to arrogance! learn to **submit to God**, verse 7 again, learn to resist the devil. Now of course we know, that the devil in different passages is determined by the context, and the devil of this chapter is, **their own ambitions and lusts**, verses 1 to 3. The ambitions of the brethren, their own personal desires were 'the devil' that James says they ought to resist on this occasion. Resist your own ambitions to promote yourself and to promote your own view! and finally he says, verse 8, 'draw nigh to God', become God-centred in your thinking and in your approach. You see, everything that the circumcision party stood for, was the very antithesis of the spirit of James, wasn't it? The teaching of James was a different spirit altogether, and yet, interestingly enough, he drew it from the Law, from the perfect Law of liberty which he understood and they didn't! How better off we would be, b&s, if we all learnt to practice the wisdom of James in ecclesial life!

Now what we've learnt then in these studies, are both negative and positive things. We've learnt of some dangers to avoid and we've learnt of some good principles to emulate. What we're going to do now is to summarize those as a concluding thought on the story of James the Just and the lessons from the Jerusalem ecclesia in which he lived and worked. Here they are, here are the principle lessons then that come forth from this story; things to avoid, and things to emulate. Well, let's take the dangers first, shall we? those things that we ought not to do!

1. We must recognize the danger of **creating rules and regulations, imposing them on others and insisting on conformity as a matter of personal righteousness.**

There's a danger in that.

2. We need to recognize the danger of creating an **ecclesia within an ecclesia** or a fellowship within a fellowship, where there is total association with some and absolutely no association with others.
3. We need to beware of the danger of **categorizing people** and doing so on the basis of their attitude to a particular issue; or establishing standards which are not agreed with or adhered to, have the effect of creating a category of second class Christadelphians.
4. We need to beware of the danger of **a stern insistence on one matter, and enlarging issues beyond their rightful measure**, and yet revealing glaring inconsistencies in other issues of equal moment and equal importance.
5. We need to beware of the danger of **contending for a viewpoint** under the banner of making **a stand for the truth**, but somehow the view advanced seems generally to focus on negative and judgmental aspects.
6. We need to beware of the danger of approaching issues with a **tone and attitude that is dogmatic, insistent, vociferous, assertive, critical, confrontational**, and then having the audacity to imagine that that's the spirit of Christ.
7. We need to beware of the danger of **casting some brethren into the mould of heros**, and casting other brethren into the mould of arch enemies; of idolizing the one and vilifying the other, and in the process, reducing controversies to mere personalities, and debating controversy by means of personal slander and personal criticism.
8. We need to beware of the danger of **agitation on matters** even after an ecclesial decision has been made, thereby ignoring the principle of mutual submission.
9. We need to beware of the danger of succumbing unwittingly to this subtle idea, that **justification can really come by works**.

So those are the things that we've got to learn to avoid, aren't they? the dangers, the lessons of those things that were manifested in the circumcision party that were not of the truth. But when we look at James and we look at his work and we look at his effect within the ecclesia, we see principles that we ought to emulate; and they're positive and they're good. These are the wholesome things that we want to take away from our study and endeavour to practice. We need to understand from James, b&s, the enormous difference between the compulsion of Law and the inspiration of principle. The one is external, ritual conformity, the other is true worship from the heart, the one leads only to death, the other brings life! and because there is such an enormous

difference between the two, we ought always to encourage education rather than legislation as a preferred alternative. We need to remember the example of James, that when difficulties arise, we ought to seek agreement on the scriptural teaching on the issue! and to be careful that we have founded any decisions that may need to be made, on that scriptural basis. Where a rule or a guide is considered needful in ecclesial life, for whatever reason, we ought to try our hardest, to try and enshrine a scriptural principle, rather than a specific Law; because divine principles are **eternal**, and they are therefore, forever true and they are forever appropriate. That's what we should seek to enshrine in ecclesial life! We need to learn, from James that the character of God is essentially positive and that His own objectives are positive. But whilst God is a God of judgment and of mercy, that He's not negative in His personality. God's objectives are always totally positive, and within that framework, the object of our own labours in manifesting the Father should be not to disrupt, not to divide, but to seek a positive result, and therefore, we should always test the fruits of our words, the fruits of our actions, the fruits of our labours by, **has this reconciled? has it healed? has it turned back? has it bound together, has it recovered? has it restored?** We need to learn from James, b&s, that it is not enough to be simply right on the issue; that those who seek to do what will be best for the truth will learn, that to do that, we must be right on the issue, and right on the motive, and right in our approach, and right in time. Although all those 4 things are important, b&s, we need to heed the teaching of James particularly on finding the right approach, and I think there's a reason for that, you see.

We focussed really on 'approach' today, haven't we? and on approach in these studies. Because you see, the issue is not necessarily of our choosing, the issue will present itself whenever it does; the motive, well that's a thing of self examination as best as we can; the time, a matter of prayerful decision; but the approach, now there is the area of our greatest involvement, and there is the area of greatest opportunity to affect the outcome, and so therefore **the approach**, the right approach is also the area of our greatest responsibility. So we're asked to follow the right approach, the spirit of gentle recovery, forbearance in language, the avoidance of censoriousness, the learning of humility, learning the art of entreaty and appeal, the confession of fault, the prayer for others, and our submission to God.

As we think of those things, b&s, we're reminded that they're not just the words of James, they're the spirit of Christ, aren't they? whom we come to remember this day! As we come to partake of bread and wine we remind ourselves that we best follow Christ, not simply by eating bread and drinking wine but by imitating Him; and that we best honour Christ by showing our love of His spirit by manifesting those characteristics in our lives. If we can, b&s, if we can walk away from these studies, and make a real commitment to practice those principles, to take up the spirit of Christ within our members, then we'll partake of bread and wine worthily, and His sacrifice will not be in vain.

Well soon, b&s, the Lord will be returned, and James will be on the earth again, restored to life, and Jerusalem will be established in the top of the mountains, and there will be another Jerusalem ecclesia. This time there will be no controversy, no schism, no evil debate, no spiteful comment, for this will be a gathering of saints, who will all be of perfect mind and perfect harmony; how thrilled James will be, b&s, to be back in the Jerusalem ecclesia of the kingdom age and that should be the ecclesia, b&s, that we aspire to join and to belong to! when that moment shall come.

Most glorious things are spoken,
Jerusalem of thee,
To all God's saints the token,
Of love and liberty.

Who shall thy hill ascending,
From pain and sorrow free,
From sin and death's contending
The living glory be!

He shall receive the blessing,
Of Yahweh's saving grace
And righteousness possessing,
Shall see Him face to face.

Yes, wondrous things are spoken
Jerusalem of thee,
The oath cannot be broken,
And we its joys shall see!

And so we shall, b&s, if we learn the spirit of our Lord, and of His brother, James the Just.