

An In-Depth Study of the Letter of James

[Part 7]

James 4:10 [NIV] *“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”*

All through the Christian Bible there runs the conviction that it is **only** the humble who can know the blessing of God.

I like the rendering of this verse in J.B. Phillips New Testament.

“You will have to feel very small in the sight of God before He will set you on your feet once more.”

Proverbs 29:23 [NIV] *“A man’s pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honour.”*

In the end it is humility that brings real and lasting honour.

Isaiah 66:2 [NIV] *“Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?” declares the LORD. “This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.”*

It is the contrite and humble person who will find favour in God’s sight.

Matthew 23:11-12 [NIV] *“The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”*

Jesus Christ was instructing His disciples as to what their attitude should be in contrast to the religious leaders of His day. [See context of these verses]

Luke 14:11 [NIV] *“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

To fully understand the application of this statement read it in context. [**Luke 14:7-14**]

It is only when we realise our own ignorance that we come to the position of asking God for guidance.

Only when we realise our spiritual poverty will we pray for the riches of God’s grace.

Only when we realise enormity of our own sins will we know that we desperately need a Saviour and the forgiveness of our Creator God.

There is in life one basic sin which is the underlying cause of all other sins.

The sin of forgetting that we are created beings and God is our Creator.

Such a realisation of our total dependence on our Creator God, is the **only** way we come to face the truth that we **only** accomplish anything of lasting value when the Holy Spirit is doing it in us or through us, [**John 15:1-5**].

Such understanding really makes our humility before God real.

James 4:11-12 [NIV] *“Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it,*

but sitting in judgment on it. *There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you, who are you to judge your neighbour?"*

The Greek word translated "slander" is "katalalia" is usually intended to mean speaking evil of someone else in that person's absence. To criticise, insult or slander someone when they are **not** there to defend themselves.

Such evil-speaking is condemned throughout the Christian Bible.

Psalms 101:5 [RSV] *"Him who slanders his neighbour secretly, I will destroy ..."*

Romans 1:30 [NIV] *"slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents;"*

Paul lists slanderers among the unredeemed evil of the Pagan world.

2 Corinthians 12:20 [NIV] *"For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarrelling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder."*

It is one of the sins that Paul is fearing he will find in the Corinthian church when he visits them.

1 Peter 2:1 [NIV] *"Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind."*

Peter also condemned this sinning attitude of mind.

There is a great necessity for this warning.

People in every generation are slow to realise that there are few sins which are so unsparingly condemned in the Christian Bible, than that of irresponsible and malicious gossip.

Yet in, as well as out of Christian fellowships, the average person finds spicy gossip a delight.

To tell or listen to the slanderous story is for most people a fascinating activity, especially if it is about some distinguished person.

Why does God condemn such an activity so strongly?

a) **It is a breach of the royal law –**

James 2:8 [NIV] *"If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbour as yourself," you are doing right."*

Obviously a person cannot speak slanderously about another and still love them.

b) **It is an infringement of the prerogative of the Creator God**

When we criticise, slander or insult another person we are passing judgement upon that person.

Psalms 139:1-6 [NIV] *"O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. You hem me in, behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain."*

Only the Creator God has such knowledge of any person, so only He is qualified to make righteous judgement.

The right of judgement belongs to the Creator God and to Him alone.

Matthew 7:1-2 [NIV] *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”*

Jesus Christ is warning us **not** to stand in judgement of other people.

When we read the rest of this passage of scripture we understand that our lack of vision will make any judgements we make unjust.

Romans 2:1-4 [NIV] *“You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realising that God’s kindness leads you towards repentance?”*

Whenever we feel justifiably angry at another person’s sin we need to be very careful how we react.

We need to speak out against sin in general but **not** in a personal way, for only the Creator God can do that.

If we are honest with ourselves we should realise that we recognise a sin in another person only because we have the same sin rooted in our personality.

For example, when Paul condemned the worship of idols before a Jewish audience, there would be an extensive nodding of heads in agreement.

Yet this Jewish audience were themselves making an idol out of the religious rituals that they so diligently kept.

Matthew 23:23 [NIV] *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices, mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law, justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practised the latter, without neglecting the former.”*

Such tithing even had become an idol being worshipped when justice, mercy and faithfulness were **not** part of their life.

Many Christians take Holy Communion, perhaps several times a week, to be reminded of Jesus Christ laying down His life as our Saviour.

But do these same people show the same love, mercy and faithfulness to other human beings by laying down their lives in loving service? [Romans 12:1]

If not the ritual of Holy Communion could become only an idol that we worship!!

Matthew 10:28 [NIV] *“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”*

Jesus Christ Himself is reminding us that only the Creator God has the right and power to give life and to destroy human existence.

This theme of life and death being only in the hands of the Creator God is played out throughout the Old Testament.

Deuteronomy 32:39 [NIV] *“See now that I myself am He! **There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no-one can deliver out of my hand.**”*

Only the Creator God is in a position to, in perfect justice, judge the life of another being.

1 Samuel 2:6 [NIV] *“**The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up.**”*

Only the Creator God can resurrect a human being out of their grave.

Psalms 68:20 [NIV] *“**Our God is a God who saves; from the Sovereign LORD comes escape from death.**”*

Only the Creator God can judge if a person can be safely given eternal life.

We may think that to speak slanderously of another person is not a very serious sin.

Scripture disagrees totally with such an assumption.

Psalms 19:13-14 [King James] *“**Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.**”*

God looks on such an action as presumptuous because we are in a proud and an arrogant attitude of mind infringing God’s prerogative.

James 4:13-16 [NIV] *“Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” Why, **you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.** What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. **Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.”** As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.”*

Here is a very practical warning for everyday life, and helps us in two ways:

a) **Helps us to realise how fleeting life is –**

Proverbs 27:1 [NIV] *“Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.”*

We need to live each day to the full. We cannot alter what happened yesterday and we can only influence tomorrow if it comes, by the way we live today.

Luke 12:16-21 [NIV] *“And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, “**You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.**”’ “But God said to him, ‘**You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?**’ “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God.”*

Preparing for retirement, our life before death and for those we leave behind after death is wise, but note the attitude of this man, *“I’ll say to myself.”*

b) **It helps us to realise that we must never neglect what will influence our existence after physical death –**

Ecclesiasticus 11:18-20 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“Others grow rich by pinching and scraping and here is the reward they receive for it. Although they say, now I can sit back and enjoy the benefit of what I have got, they do not know how long this will last, they will have to leave their goods to others and die. Stick to your job, work hard at it, and grow old at your work.”*

I have not read in scripture any person whom God has chosen to use, giving up their work and retiring!

James 4:17 [NIV] *“Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.”*

This uncertainty of life is not a cause either for fear or for inaction because of insecurity of the future.

It is a reason for accepting and realising our complete dependence on God.

I have found in my personal ministry in God’s Church, that the most receptive congregation for the Good News of the gospel message is found in a funeral congregation.

My message at such a service has mainly concentrated on the living rather than the dead.

Such an approach has brought countless messages of thanks from the various congregations.

A true Christian is **not** terrorised into fear, nor paralysed into inaction by the uncertainty of the future, but commits the future and all their plans into the hands of God.

Also every true Christian remembers that **not** all of their plans for the future may come within the will and purpose of the Creator God.

If we know this inactivity is a sin when we are only self-motivated, we are more likely to be willing to expend our lives in the service of others who haven’t been as blessed as we have been. [**Romans 12:1**]

This serving of others should involve both the physical and the spiritual.

Often the physical compassion towards another can open them up to the love and compassion of their Creator God.

Humans tend to think that doing wrong is the only way we can sin.

James tells us that not doing what is right is also a sin.

These two kinds of sin are often expressed as sins of commission and sins of omission.

For example, it is a sin to tell a lie, but can also be a sin to know the truth and not tell it.

It is a sin, as we have seen, to slander a person, but it can also be a sin to avoid a person who needs help that we can provide in friendship with them.

We must always be open to the Holy Spirit as He directs us towards those He wants us to serve.

If God has directed you to doing a kind act or to render a service to another human being we **must** do it.

If we respond in this way we will experience a renewal of our Christian faith, and find peace of mind as we are an instrument in the hands of our Creator God.

Always remember that our future is not in our hands but the hands of our Creator God.