

## Chapter XVI

### SPEAK NOT EVIL ONE OF ANOTHER

The events and statements in the book of James to this point have been for the purpose of bringing James's Jewish brethren to Christ. Anyone who has ever had the opportunity to witness the truth of the saving grace of Jesus Christ to religious people knows how difficult it is to keep them from dodging the issue of salvation by their insistence that they believe in God. They have no concept of salvation, but they defend themselves by citing their religious values and traditions. Thus the fact that they are religious gives them a sense of self-satisfaction and superiority.

Consequently James's experiences with *the twelve tribes scattered abroad* parallels our experiences with the religious, both in and outside of the canopy of Christianity. Like the Jews to whom James wrote, these individuals often seek to establish their righteousness before God by the common practice of accusing others and excusing themselves. This is a very necessary practice, because it diverts them from their own corruption by providing a sense of relative righteousness. Even so, it is impossible to establish a genuine righteousness before God by such

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a practice: *For there is not a just man upon the earth that doeth good, and sinneth not* (Ecclesiastes 7:20). *As it is written, There is none righteous, no not one* (Romans 3:10).

Consequently James advised his Jewish brethren:

Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth 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 judgest another? (James 4:11-12, emphasis mine)

Thus James revealed to the Jews of the *diaspora* that the unscrupulous practice of establishing one's own righteousness by judging others corrupted the righteous concepts of the law. Those who saw others much worse than themselves, whether with the Jews of the *diaspora* or with the religious of our day, violated all that they claimed to keep. So James revealed that such a practice was evil. It certainly did not convey the spirit of the royal law (which they claimed to keep), *thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*. In keeping with this, the apostle Paul wrote:

... thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? (Romans 2:1-3)

It should be clear, the man who seeks to justify himself by judging others does not stand in the righteousness of Christ. He stands in a feigned self-righteousness. There is absolutely no need for a believer to feign righteousness. The believer stands in the perfect righteousness of Christ by faith. Therefore the parade of self-righteousness, which is often displayed at the expense of others, is a manifestation of the double-mindedness of the one who judges others. This hypocrisy and self-righteousness is prima facie evidence that the individual who expresses it is not a child of God. It is strong evidence he is a spiritual bastard.

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The entire human family, apart from faith in Jesus Christ, is dead in trespasses and in sin. Consequently no one has the right to judge another in the matter of sin. For this reason James wrote, *There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?* All that comes from self-righteous judgment is the inflation of the judge's ego, which, as we have seen, has its roots in the sin nature of man.

There is an arrogance which accompanies the self-righteous judge. He perceives all he does is right. He has the attitude he is the master of his fate, he is the captain of his soul. To counter this James wrote:

Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. (James 4:13-15, emphasis mine)

James addressed the self-righteous Jews directly. He attempted to show them that their attitude should have been directed by a concern for God's will. They, like so many in this world, had the attitude that they could order their lives completely. They could go where they wished, when they wished. They could buy and sell and get gain. They could live their lives any way they wished, without regard to the Word of God or to the will of God. Thus they lived their lives as though they were immortal.

Consequently James explained to them (according to the meaning of the Greek text), life is but *an exhalation of a breath* (like a vapor on a cold morning). It appears for a little while, and then it passes away. One moment we have life, and the next moment it is gone. Why then should the purpose of life be missed by so many? Why should a man conceive he could make himself fit

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for God's presence by magnifying the errors of someone else and minimizing his own? The whole practice is folly. It has no basis in logic nor in the Word of God.

God gave Solomon great wisdom in these matters. Consequently Solomon wrote about the purpose of life in the book of Ecclesiastes. In that book Solomon tells us how he pursued all of the things which man counts important to find what a man should do all the days of his life. Solomon amassed great wealth. He enjoyed the pleasures of life. He gained knowledge and he also acted the fool. He tried virtually everything that man counts dear. He determined through his experiments that all of the things man counts important in life are *vanity and vexation of spirit*. This is true because *one event happeneth to them all*. They all die. Therefore if a man dies without placing his faith in Jesus Christ, he dies in vain.

The purpose of life, then, is not to build a sham relationship with God based upon self-righteousness. The purpose of life is to come into a right relationship with God based upon God's promises. Solomon and James agreed completely. Therefore James told the Jews: *But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin* (James 4:16-17).

The man who seeks to justify himself by his own self-righteousness is compelled to boast in his superior sanctity, ability, wealth, station in life, etc. The Lord addressed this problem when He:

... spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto

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heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. (Luke 18:9-14, emphasis mine)

No one in Scripture portrays the self-righteous judge better than the Pharisee in our Lord's parable. That Pharisee was a perfect characterization of the Jewish nation as a whole. According to James's evaluation and our Lord's parable, the average Jew sought to justify himself by finding fault with others.

The natural mind cannot conceive why the Pharisee should be condemned and the publican should be justified. This simply points out the fact that our ways are not God's ways. Man thinks in terms of relative righteousness (graded on the curve), while God operates in the realm of absolute righteousness. This is the essence of the gospel. Therefore the apostle Paul said our salvation is:

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:5-7)

The Jews who trusted in their self-righteousness were in a tenuous position indeed. All of their boastings were born out of an idea of superiority to the Gentiles or by their observance of the traditions of the elders or by their judgment of others. Therefore James wrote, *All such rejoicing [boasting] is evil.*

The result of James's argument was the removal of the Jews' facade. They no longer had a cloak of righteousness in which to hide. Thus they were laid bare before the Lord, Who is the Righteous Judge. The door of self-righteousness was barred. The Jews could not crawl back

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inside. James drove the last nail into the barricade. Then he said, *Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*

James's argument was entirely Scriptural. The Jews should have known that. They could not continue in their facade. They would have to come to grips with the truth. Thus in the next few lines of his letter, James provided the Jews with the information they needed. All they had to do was ask God for the *wisdom, that is from above* and receive it by faith, without wavering. If the Jews would receive the salvation of their souls, they would find the purpose of life. Thus they could say with Solomon of old:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments [through belief in Jesus Christ]: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

*The fear of God*, in this text, was revealed by Solomon when he wrote Proverbs chapter fourteen and verse twenty-seven: *The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.*