

**January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2007**  
**“Using God’s Gift to Avoid Anger”**

Reverend Darryl R. Curtis

**James 1:16-20**

**16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.**

**17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.**

**18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.**

**19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;**

**20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

In our last lesson, we reviewed the purpose of wisdom in our lives, that being to help us to live our lives in such a way that, at the end of our lives, we have a resume that indicates that we took on the tasks that the Lord set to our hands, even as Jesus took on the Cross and became our intercessor at the right hand of God. While it will probably not be ours to endure the Cross, we are admonished to run the race that God has given us to run with endurance, taking on the trials that our race entails.

Well, how do we do that?

What is the key to serving God in the way that He wishes? In case we lack clarity as to we can do God’s will in His way that His Kingdom might come, our text tells us, in **James 1:5-8**  
**5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.**

**6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.**

**7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;**

**8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.**

If we lack wisdom, we can receive it from God. An excellent Scriptural example is the great King of Israel, Solomon, who was a young man when his father David, on his deathbed, bequeathed the kingship to him. **1Kings 2:1-4** records:

**1 Now the days of David drew near that he should die, and he charged Solomon his son, saying:**

**2 “I go the way of all the earth; be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man.**

**3 And keep the charge of the LORD your God: to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn;**

**4 that the LORD may fulfill His word which He spoke concerning me, saying, ‘If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul,’ He said, ‘you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.’**

Solomon received the charge from his father David to walk in the way of truth before God, keeping God’s statutes and commandments. Although Solomon received the charge, he was a young man, and not completely equipped to carry it out. However, David trained his son well enough that he taught Solomon what to do to get God’s attention, and that was to offer God an exceptional offering. Solomon did so, and the episode is recorded in the Scriptures, beginning in **1Kings 3:3-5**, which says:

**3 And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David, except that he sacrificed and burned incense at the high places.**

**4 Now the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place: Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.**

**5 At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, “Ask! What shall I give you?”**

Solomon knew his deficiency, and he proceeded to ask God to meet his need, in **1Kings 3:6-9**:

**6 And Solomon said: “You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You; You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.**

**7 Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in.**

**8 And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted.**

**9 Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?”**

Solomon’s request pleased God, because it met the guidelines of prayer that James gives us in **James 4:2-3**, which tells us, in part, why are actions and prayers are sometimes ineffective, as it says:

**2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.**

**3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.**

Solomon asked for wisdom, not so that he could amass a fortune, a greater kingdom or the death of his enemies, but so that he could discern between good and evil. You may remember our review last week of the activities of our first parents whom were deceived by the lies of the devil. Wisdom in decision making allows us to see the snares that the serpent has set for us, and to avoid them because of our awareness of them. God believes in forewarning us about impending calamity with His Word.

We could avoid most of the mistakes that we make in life if we went to bed every night praying a prayer based upon the sentiment that Solomon expressed in his prayer in **1Kings 3:6-9**, and meaning that which we say. God honors this type of prayer, as He shows in **1Kings 3:10-15**, which says:

**10 The speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked this thing.**

**11 Then God said to him: “Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice,**

**12 behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you.**

**13 And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days.**

**14 So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.”**

**15 Then Solomon awoke; and indeed it had been a dream. And he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD, offered up burnt offerings, offered peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants.**

We generally know what it is that we want when we pray, but Solomon recognized, as did Jesus when He gave us the model prayer, and when He prayed in Gethsemane, that we lack the foresight to make good decisions about the future, and that it is better for us to receive that which God considers the best for us than to have our wishes come true. In our immaturity, we often fail to consider all facets of a circumstance before we make a decision, and without the intervention of the wisdom of God, we may overlook a crucial component of the situation that would change the course of our situation.

My wife and I have an ongoing discussion about the fact that I write my sermons only hours before I preach them, and I am often printing the bulletins and completing the Powerpoint presentation early on Sunday morning. As I was writing this sermon, I reflected on the first time I had to give a major presentation after my promotion to management at Michigan Bell, many years ago. I was given a particular process to analyze, to determine whether or not it would be productive for the company to implement the process. About three days before the presentation, I had the text and handouts for my presentation completed (this was before Powerpoint was ubiquitous in corporate management).

I went over my analysis daily in the final days leading up to the presentation date. I took one last swing at it the night before, and realized that something was incorrect in the calculations that I was about to present. Exactly what I miscalculated escapes me now, almost 30 years later, but I knew that I needed to redo the presentation. I was up all that night, and finally, early in the morning, I completed the presentation with a completely changed conclusion.

I had enough time to take a shower and put my suit on, and I went to the meeting with my recently revised presentation. Caffeine allowed me to be coherent during the presentation and to answer the questions that senior management asked me. My District manager made the comment that it took a lot of courage for a new manager to tell him that his idea is all wet, and I assured him that I was not aware of his position on the idea either pro or con, but that I was only

presenting the conclusion to which the facts led me. I still, to this day, go over presentations at the last minute to check them because I know that I need to have my facts straight. I think that the Lord blesses my thinking most at the last minute, and that may be why I wait until the end.

I am not under any illusions about my ability to develop coherent presentations, as James admonishes me in our text for this morning, **James 1:16**, which says:

**16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.**

I, like Solomon, recognize that any skill that I may have is not because of my ability, but because of my indwelling. I, like hopefully all of us who are knowledgeable Christians, know the position that I need to hold to glorify God in that which I do. **Galatians 2:20** tells us:

**20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.**

James reiterates this sentiment in our text, **James 1:17-18**, which says:

**17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.**

**18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.**

The good and perfect gift of which James is speaking in **James 1:17** is the gift of wisdom, the knowledge and understanding of the word of truth. My knowledge of the proper course of action in any circumstance is a function of my ability to recall the information which the Lord has given me, has told me to learn, and has made the application clear to me. Paul tells us, in **2Timothy 3:16-17**:

**16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,**

**17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

He further admonishes us, in **2Timothy 2:15-16**:

**15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.**

**16 But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.**

Many associate the “good and perfect gift” of which James speaks in his writings with the power of God to rearrange reality, but the Bible itself testifies that its contents are the true gift from God. Jesus lets us know that the Word of God is even a greater blessing than His own birth, as He says, in **Luke 11:27-28**:

**27 And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, “Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!”**

**28 But He [Jesus] said, “More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”**

So now, we know that God’s Word is that “good and perfect gift” that He has given us, and to have the effectual desire to learn and to follow God’s commandments is more precious than His granting of any other desire that we might have.

How can we prepare ourselves to put this great gift of wisdom into practice? James gives us a three point plan to implement the Word of God. Because of the constraints of time, we will

only be able to get to the first point today, which is given in **James 1:19-20**, which says:

**19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;**

**20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**

God tells us that wrath, or anger, has the effect of negating our ability to follow His commandments. The Biblical example is that of Moses, the leader of the Children of Israel, who lost his position of leadership because he allowed the constant complaining of the Children of Israel to get under his skin when the Israelites once again reached a desert place in the Wilderness, in **Numbers 20:2-5**:

**2 Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron.**

**3 And the people contended with Moses and spoke, saying: "If only we had died when our brethren died before the LORD!**

**4 Why have you brought up the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here?**

**5 And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink."**

This complaint against Moses and Aaron is a constant one. The Israelites find it difficult to complain directly against God, and so they use Moses and Aaron as their whipping boys. The Israelites refused to obey Moses, Joshua and Caleb when they exhorted them to fight the required war to take the Promised Land in Numbers chapter 14, and now the Israelites are on a 40 year trek, decreed by God, the objective of which is to allow all of the 600,000 + men who were 20 years old or older when the Israelites refused the Promised Land to die in the Wilderness.

Because of the lack of water, Moses goes to the tabernacle, the place in which the Spirit of God dwells, to inquire of the Lord as to what they should do. **Numbers 20:6-8** records God's instructions:

**6 So Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and they fell on their faces. And the glory of the LORD appeared to them.**

**7 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,**

**8 "Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals."**

Here Moses made his tactical error. Rather than following the instructions of God to the letter, Moses improvised in order to vent his spleen, in **Numbers 20:9-10**:

**9 So Moses took the rod from before the LORD as He commanded him.**

**10 And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?"**

We hear the blasphemy of Moses. Who is this "we" of whom Moses speaks? James tells us, in our text, **James 1:17**:

**17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.**

Lehman Strauss, in his book, *Sense and Nonsense about Prayer*, relates the following story:

A boy carrying a loaf of bread from the bakery to his house was stopped by his pastor. The minister said, “Charles, where did you get that loaf of bread?”

“From the baker,” was the boy’s reply.

“Yes, I know that, but where did the baker get it?”

“He made it,” said the boy.

“But how did he make it?”

The boy answered, “Sir, he made it with flour.”

“Tell me, where did he get his flour?”

“He ground it from the grain.”

“Do you know where he got his grain?”

“Yes sir, he got the grain from the farmer.”

The minister said, “Now Charles, I will ask you one more question, and I want you to think carefully before you answer. How did the farmer get his grain?”

The lad hesitated and then replied, “God made the grain grow.”

That was exactly what the boy’s pastor had hoped he would say. “You are right, Charles. Then, you got your loaf of bread from God. So remember, when you sit down to supper tonight, to thank God for it.”

The Bible tells us, in **Philippians 4:6-8**:

**6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;**

**7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.**

**8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.**

In this episode in Numbers, God was benevolently providing water for His people through the ministry of Moses. Moses’ job in this case was roughly the same as mine here at the Church, that being to speak the Word of God in the way that He instructs me to speak it into the situations in which we find ourselves. Moses was not instructed to admonish the people, as God previously decided that the people committed a sin worthy of death, and they would not be in need of admonishment until the 600,000 men who were destined to die were gone from the camp.

**Philippians 4:8** gives us the formula for thinking in the way that God would have us to think. We are to think of those positive things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praiseworthy. Of course, there are things in life that do not fit the preceding description, but those things that are negative are the things about which we are to supplicate, to pray, to diligently seek the mercy of God to fix and the peace of God to endure.

Some things have to be endured. Moses, as the leader, and as the one that exhorted Israel to go into the Promised Land at the behest of God, was stuck leading the Israelites through the Wilderness. The famine and the thirst that they suffered affected Moses as well as the other

Israelites, even as it affected the next generation of Israelites that were not old enough to make the decision to enter the Promised Land when their elders refused.

Sometimes, because of our association with others, we have to suffer for things that are not personally our fault, as do they because of their association with us. When we are in this situation, and we feel vengeful and resentful because of our situation, we should remember the admonishment of James from our text, **James 1:19-20**, which says:

**19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;**

**20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**

The object lesson is that should we be able to avoid losing our temper and sinning when faced with the results of the sins of others, God will be able to produce righteousness from our restraint.

Many people feel it necessary to vent their spleen when they are irritated, and they justify their position by saying that they are only being honest. But God does not tell us to be honest about our negative feelings, but to be slow to speak and slow to wrath. Moses might have remembered before he started calling rebels that although he did not sin in the matter of the entrance to the Promised Land, that he himself was a murderer, so maybe he was not in the position to judge his peers after all.

None of us has the righteousness required to admonish our brother. I really can't tell you what you can and cannot do based upon my spotless and sinless life, because I do not have such a life. I am personally glad that you are not following me around every day to listen to my conversation and see my actions, because if you were, some of you might be so negatively impressed that you would never come back again.

My counsel is not based upon my track record, however, but upon what God, in His Word, tells me to tell you. For example, I can admonish you to not to drink alcohol excessively, not because I have never been drunk, but based upon **Ephesians 5:18**, which instructs all of us: **18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,**

Moses was not instructed to be angry and to call the people names, but Moses was to glorify God by speaking to the rock that water might flow and refresh the people. Since God did not instruct that the people be admonished, Moses ought not have taken the initiative to do so on his own, but he did, and reaped the penalty of his actions. **Numbers 20:11-12** records:

**11 Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank.**

**12 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."**

How attractive do you find an angry person?

How attractive do you find a person that holds a grudge?

How attractive do you find someone that holds on to perceived injustices to use them as a club to beat the person that wronged them into submission? How easy is for you to forget your sins and punish others when you get in a one-up position as did Moses in **Numbers 20**?

I was listening to a woman that wanted to obtain a divorce being counseled about her marital problems. The therapist asked her, “What has your husband done that justifies your desire to divorce him?”

“He’s controlling and emotionally abusive”, was her response.

The therapist asked, “Well, if he were here and I asked him what faults you have, what would he say?”

“My fault”, the woman said, “is that I have put up with his emotional abuse for too long.”

“No”, said the therapist, “listen to my question. What have YOU done to contribute your marital disharmony? I don’t want to hear about what he has done, I want to hear about what you have done.”

The woman paused as she realized that which the therapist was asking. “Well”, she said, “the only thing that I can think of is that I’ve been too tolerant of his faults.”

The therapist tried to focus the woman on the things that she may have done in the marriage by giving some examples of what she might have done to irritate her husband, but the woman denied any responsibility for the problems that they were having. As far as she was concerned, she was an angel married to the devil. Finally, the therapist gave up.

“You know”, she said, “I would need to talk to your husband to help you with your situation, because the only person that I can help is the one that needs to make a change, and, according to you, you are the perfect wife and he is just a brute. I doubt that an objective assessment of your marital situation would bring us to that conclusion, but since I can’t get any information from you about your part in this problem, going on with this conversation is counterproductive without your husband to tell his side of the story.”

It is easy to forget our own faults when faced with the faults of others, as did Moses, in the example of the rock. God, however, has an impeccable record of that which we have done, and deals with our sins accordingly. Moses, because of his forgetfulness of his own faults, died in the wilderness as did those who refused to go into the Promised Land, because, **James 1:20** tells us:

**20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**

As Christians, we need to redefine our reality. Because of our worldly orientation, we feel justified in being angry with others, especially when they are in the wrong, as people often are.

**Romans 3:23** tells us:

**23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**, so there are, never have been, and never will be any perfect people, with the exception of Jesus Christ.

The question is: what ought be our response to being wronged and how can we control our anger? Let me conclude my presentation for today with God’s wisdom on the subject, which is given to us in several passages of Scripture, beginning with **Galatians 6:1-2**, which tells us:

**1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.**

**2 Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.**

**1Peter 3:8-12** admonishes:

**8 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous;**



**9** not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.

**10** For “He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit.

**11** Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it.

**12** For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.”

**Romans 12:17-21** instructs:

**17** Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.

**18** If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

**19** Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.

**20** Therefore “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.”

**21** Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

And finally, our text, **James 1:19-20**

**19** So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;

**20** for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

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