

THE GENERAL EPISTLES

Compiled by

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THE GENERAL EPISTLES

1. Introduction; The Book of James Chapters 1 and 2
2. The Book of James Chapters 3-5
3. Introduction to the letters of John
4. I John 1:1-I John 2:11
5. I John 2:12-29
6. I John 3:1-I John 4:21
7. I John 5
8. James, I, II, and III John, and Jude

Textbook: *The Holy Bible*

Class Requirements:

- 1) Class attendance and participation.
- 2) Read James, I, II, and III John, and Jude
- 3) Final Exam

LESSON ONE

Introduction to the Book of James

- 1) James is one of the books which had a very hard fight to get into the New Testament.
- 2) How did it become included in the *New Testament*?
- 3) Luther thought highly of the Book of James, but did not hold it to be of apostolic authorship.

The Author of James

- 1) There were many Jameses in the New Testament.
 - a) James who was the father of the member of the Twelve called Judas, not Iscariot (Luke 6:16).
 - b) There is James, the son of Alphaeus, who was a member of the Twelve.
 - c) There is the James who is called James the Younger and is mentioned in Mark 15:40.
 - d) There is James, the brother of John, and the son of Zebedee, a member of the Twelve (the first to be martyred—beheaded on the orders of Herod Agrippa the First in the year A.D. 44).
 - e) Finally, there is James, who is called the brother of Jesus.
- 2) The relationship of the letter to Paul's writings.
- 3) It is plain that the writer of this letter is steeped in the Old Testament.
- 4) It has been suggested that *James* was written by someone else under the name of the Lord's brother.

James 1:1

- 1) The letter is addressed to the twelve tribes who are scattered abroad.
- 2) Who are the twelve tribes?

Tested and Triumphant

James 1:2-4

- 1) Trials.
- 2) If we meet this testing in the right way, it will produce unswerving constancy or steadfastness.

James 1:5-11

- 1) If lack wisdom, ask and God will give it.
- 2) Verses 9-11.
 - a) Christianity brings to the poor man a new sense of his own value.
 - b) Christianity brings to the rich man a new sense of self-abasement.
- 3) Verses 13-25
 - a) God tempts no man; we are tempted when we are drawn away of our own lusts.
 - b) Every good gift comes from the Father of lights.

- c) Quick to hear; slow to speak; slow to anger.
- d) The engrafted word is able to save you souls.
- e) Doers of the word and not hearers only.
- f) Must bridle tongue to be true worshiper of God.
- g) True religion and undefiled is to visit the widows and orphans.

James 2:

- 1) Respect of persons.
 - a) “undue and unfair partiality; pandering to someone because he is rich or influential or popular.”
 - b) The Church must be the one place where all distinctions are wiped out.
- 2) Abraham Lincoln said that “God must love the common people because he made so many of them.”
- 3) The Royal Law.
 - a) Love God.
 - b) Love your neighbor.
- 4) Vv. 12,13. The Law of Liberty.
- 5) Vv.14-26. Faith and works.

LESSON TWO

James Chapters 3 through 5

The Tongue

James Chapter 3

- 1) There is no sin easier to fall and none which has graver consequences than the sin of the tongue.
- 2) James draws two pictures of the tongue:
- 3) James is not saying that silence is better than speech.
- 4) The damage the tongue can cause is like that caused by a forest fire.
- 5) The tongue can be a blessing or a cursing.
- 6) Two kinds of wisdom.

Chapter 4

- 1) Fightings and war.
- 2) Love for the world is enmity against God.
- 3) Vv. 11,12. Man cannot love his neighbor as himself and speak slanderous evil about him.
- 4) Vv. 13-17. Can't boast of tomorrow.

Chapter 5

- 1) Vv. 1-3.
 - a) In the first six verses, James has two aims:
 - b) In the east there were three main sources of wealth and James has a word for the decay of each of them.
 - c) The social passion of the Bible.
 - d) The Bible does not condemn wealth as such but there is no book which more strenuously insists on wealth's responsibility and on the perils which surround a man who is abundantly blessed with this world's goods.
 - e) Here is condemnation of selfish riches and warning of where they must end.
- 2) Vv. 7-9.
 - a) Patience until the coming of the Lord.
 - i) *Parousia* is a word that speaks of someone's presence or arrival.
 - ii) *Epiphaneia* (Titus 2:13; 2 Tim. 4:1; Thes 2:9) Used for the appearance of a god to his worshipper.
 - iii) *Apokalupsisi* means "unveiling" or "a laying bare"
 - iv) The Second Coming of Jesus:
 - (1) The arrival of the king.
 - (2) God appearing to his people, and the mounting of his eternal throne.
 - (3) God directing on the world the full blaze of his heavenly glory.
 - b) Patience for the harvest.

The Multi-faceted Church

James 5:13-15

- 1) A praying church.
- 2) A singing church.
- 3) A healing church.

Restoration

James 5:19,20

- 1) If a man goes astray, and one rescues him from the error of his ways and brings him back to the right path—save brother and cover a multitude of sins.
- 2) Covering a multitude of sins.

LESSON THREE

Introduction to the First Letter of John

A Personal Letter and Its Background

- 1) First John is entitled a letter but it has no opening address nor closing greetings.
- 2) Written in Ephesus a little after A.D. 100.

The Falling Away

- 1) Many were now second or even third generation Christians.
- 2) There were members of the Church who found the standards which Christianity demanded a burden and a weariness.
- 3) First John shows no signs that the Church to which it was written was being persecuted.

The Contemporary Philosophy

- 1) Gnosticism.
- 2) The false teachers.
- 3) Denial of Jesus' Messiahship.
- 4) The Denial of the Incarnation.
- 5) Major beliefs of Gnostics.
- 6) John's writing.
 - a) The object of John's writing.
 - b) The idea of God.
 - c) The idea of Jesus.
 - d) The Spirit.
 - e) The world.
 - f) The fellowship of the Church.
 - g) The righteousness of the Christian.
- 7) The Destination of the Letter

LESSON FOUR

John 1:1-John 2:13

Introduction

- 1) Objects in writing.
- 2) The pastor's right to speak.
- 3) The pastor's message.

God Is Light

1 John 1:5

- 1) What light tells us about God.
- 2) The Hostile Dark
 - a) Through the New Testament darkness stands for the very opposite of the Christian life.
 - b) Darkness stands for the Christless life.
 - c) The dark is hostile to the light.
 - d) The darkness stands for the ignorance of life apart from Christ.
 - e) The darkness stands for the chaos of life without God.
 - f) The darkness stands for the immorality of the Christless life.
 - g) The darkness is characteristically unfruitful.
 - h) Darkness is connected with lovelessness and hate.
 - i) The dark is the abode of the enemies of Christ.

The Necessity of Walking in the Light

1 John 1:6,7

- 1) John insists on certain things.
- 2) Truth is more than intellectual; it is always moral.
- 3) Two great tests of truth.
- 4) The threefold lie.

The Sinner's Self-Deception

- 1) John condemns two mistaken ways of thought.

The Work of Jesus

1 John 2:1,2

- 1) Jesus is our advocate with the Father.
- 2) Jesus the Propitiation

The True Knowledge of God

1 John 2:3-6

- 1) To know God.
- 2) Knowing God comes by His own revelation.
- 3) To know God is to experience his love in Christ, and to return that love in obedience.

The New and Old Commandment

1 John 2:7,8

- 1) Old because it was already there in the Old Testament.
- 2) The Defeat of Darkness.
- 3) To John the Second Coming of Christ is not one sudden, dramatic event but a process in which the darkness is steadily being defeated by the light; and the end of the process will be a world in which the darkness is totally defeated and the light triumphs.
- 4) Light is identified with love and the dark with hate.

Love and Hate; Light and Dark

- 1) Love for those in foreign lands.
- 2) Love for those near at hand.
- 3) How do we regard our fellow man?
- 4) The effect of love and hate.

LESSON FIVE

First John 2:12-29

Remembering Who We Are

1 John 2:12-14

- 1) Three titles.
 - a) Little children.
 - b) Young men.
 - c) Fathers.
- 2) Could represent three age groups in the church.
- 3) Problems.
- 4) God's gifts in Christ.

Rivals for the Human Heart

1 John 2:15-17

- 1) The Jews saw time as the present world and the world to come.
- 2) The Christian, in Christ, the age to come had arrived.
- 3) What is meant by the world, the *kosmos*?
- 4) John has two things to say about the man who loves the world and compromises with it.

The Time of the Last Hour

1 John 2:18

- 1) The last days.
- 2) The last hour does not mean a time of annihilation whose end will be a great nothingness.
- 3) Will a man be wiped out in the judgment of the old or will he enter into the glory of the new?
- 4) The Anti-Christ.
- 5) The anti-Christ is not so much a person as a principle.
- 6) The battleground was in the mind.

The Sifting of the Church

1 John 2:19-21

- 1) John sees in the Church a time of sifting.
- 2) The last phrase of verse 19 can have two meanings.
- 3) John's object was not to communicate fresh knowledge, but to bring into active and decisive use the knowledge which his readers already possessed.
- 4) Things would be different if we would only put into practice what we already know.

The Master Lie

1 John 2:22,23

- 1) The ultimate liar is he who denies that Jesus is the Christ.
- 2) To deny Jesus is indeed the master lie.
- 3) There are three New Testament confessions of Jesus.
- 4) The Christian faith depends on the unique relationship of Jesus to God.

The Universal Privilege

1 John 2:24-29

- 1) In Hebrew thought and practice anointing was connected with three kinds of people.
- 2) The High Priest was called *The Anointed*; but the supreme *Anointed One* was the *Messiah* (*Messiah* is the Hebrew for *The Anointed One* and *Christos* is the Greek equivalent).
- 3) What is the anointing?
- 4) Two tests by which to judge any new teaching offered to us.
- 5) Abiding in Christ

LESSON SIX

The Privileges of the Christian Life

1 John 3:1,2

- 1) A privilege to be called the children of God.
- 2) In the New Testament, there is the idea of adoption.
- 3) When Christ appears in his glory, we shall be like him.
- 4) The purpose for which the Son of God appeared was that he might destroy the works of the devil.

The Man Who Is Born of God

1 John 3:9

- 1) "...because his seed abides in him."
- 2) The man who is born of God cannot sin.

The Marks of the Children of God

1 John 3:10-18

- 1) Why the commandment of love is so important.
- 2) The world's resentment of the Christian way.

If Our Hearts Condemn Us Not

1 John 3:19-24a

- 1) There is no condemnation in Christ Jesus.
- 2) In the human heart there are bound to come doubts.
- 3) We must love one another as he gave us his commandment (John 13:34)
- 4) Two commandments.
- 5) We cannot begin the Christian life until we accept Jesus Christ for what he is; and we have not accepted him in any real sense of the term until our attitude to men is the same as his own attitude of love.

The Life of the Spirit

1 John 3:24b-4:1

- 1) In the early Church, there was a surging life of the Spirit.
- 2) In the early Church, the spiritual world was very near.
- 3) If there were evil spirits as well as the Holy Spirit, men could be occupied by them.

- 4) It is in face of that surging atmosphere of pulsating spiritual life that John sets out his criteria to judge between the true and the false.
- 5) The *Didache, The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, is the first service order book and is to be dated not long after A.D. 100.
- 6) John 4:1-7

The Ultimate Heresy

1 John 4:2,3

- 1) John lays down two tests of belief.

The Cleavage Between the World and God

1 John 4:4-6

- 1) The Christian need not fear the heretic.
- 2) The false teachers will neither listen to, nor accept, the truth which the true Christian offers.
- 3) There are no limits to the grace of God, and there is such a person as the Holy Spirit.

Love Human and Divine

1 John 4:7-21

- 1) Love has its origin in God.
- 2) Love has a double relationship to God.
- 3) It is by love that God is known.
- 4) God's love is demonstrated in Jesus Christ.
- 5) Human love is a response to divine love.
- 6) When love comes, fear goes.
- 7) Love of God and love of man are indissolubly connected.
- 8) God is love.
- 9) Son of God and savior of men.

LESSON SEVEN

1 John 5:1,2

- 1) Love of God and love of man are inseparable parts of the same experience.
- 2) A natural law of human life: family love is a part of nature.
- 3) The Christian by virtue of his rebirth is set within the family of God and as he loves the Father, so must he also love the children who are of the same family as he is.

The Necessary Obedience

1 John 5:3,4a

- 1) Obedience is the only proof of love.
- 2) God's commandments are not heavy.
- 3) The Scribal and Pharisaic mass of rules and regulations could be an intolerable burden on the shoulders of any man.
- 4) My yoke is easy and my burden is light.

The Conquest of the World

1 John 5:4b,5

- 1) Our faith conquers the world.
- 2) We have a defense to resist the infections of the world.
- 3) We have a strength to endure the attacks of the world.
- 4) We have the hope of final victory.

The Water and the Blood

1 John 5:6-8

- 1) In connection with Jesus water and blood can refer only to two events of his life.
- 2) Both the baptism and the Cross of Jesus are essential parts of his Messiahship.
- 3) Cerinthus taught that at the baptism the divine Christ descended into the man.
- 4) The triple witness.

The Undeniable Witness

1 John 5:9,10

- 1) Behind this passage are two basic ideas.
- 2) Difference in believing a man and believing in a man.
- 3) If a man refuses to accept the evidence of men who have experienced what Christ can do, the evidence of the deeds of Christ, the evidence of the Scriptures, the evidence of God's Holy Spirit, the evidence of God himself, in effect he is calling God a liar.

The Essence of the Faith

1 John 5:11-13

- 1) The essence of the Christian life is eternal life.
- 2) In God there is peace; eternal life means serenity.
- 3) In God there is power.
- 4) In God there is holiness.
- 5) In God there is love.
- 6) In God there is life.

The Basis and the Principle of Prayer

1 John 5:14,15

- 1) The basis and principle of prayer.
- 2) Prayer is not just talking to God; it is listening to Him also.

Praying for the Brother Who Sins

1 John 5:16,17

- 1) Intercessory prayer for another.
- 2) Three things.
- 3) Mortal sins.
- 4) Three other thoughts on mortal sins.
- 5) Likely mortal sin is the state of the man who has listened to sin and refused to listen to God so often, that he loves his sin and regards it as the most profitable thing in the world.

The Threefold Certainty

1 John 5:18-20

- 1) A three-fold Christian certainty.

The Constant Peril

1 John 5:21

- 1) In Greek, the word *idol* has in it the sense of unreality.
- 2) An idol is anything in this life which men worship instead of God and allow to take the place of God.
- 3) Keep yourselves from the pollutions of heathen worship.
- 4) It would have been difficult for a Christian to stay free of the influence of the false gods of Ephesus, but John demands that it be done.

LESSON EIGHT

Second John, Third John, and Jude

The Elder

- 1) Second John begins: “The elder to the elect lady and her children.”
- 2) Third John begins: “The elder to the beloved Gaius.”
- 3) Elder.
- 4) No doubt the two letters are from the same hand.
 - a) Second John.
 - b) Third John.
- 5) Close connection of these two to First John.
- 6) The elect lady.
- 7) Third John is written to one called Gaius, whose character and actions John most thoroughly approves.
- 8) John is writing to urge Gaius to receive the wandering teachers and not to be intimidated by the domineering Diotrephes.
- 9) The Threefold Ministry
 - a) Apostles.
 - b) Prophets.
 - c) Elders.
- 10) The problem of the wandering preachers.
- 11) No doubt that the early church experienced problems with these wandering prophets.
- 12) The clash of the ministries.
- 13) Eventually, the apostles passed from the earth; wandering preachers faded from the scene, and the settled ministry became the ministry of the church.

Second John

- 1) John writes in love to warn.
- 2) Many deceivers who say Jesus is not come in the flesh.
- 3) If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him.
- 4) I hope to see you soon.

Third John

- 1) Greeting to Gaius.
- 2) In the ancient world hospitality was a sacred duty.
- 3) Diotrephes is the representative of the local congregation.
- 4) Demetrius is most likely the leader of the wandering preachers.

Jude

- 1) Reason for addressing ourselves to the study of *Jude*.
- 2) The Warnings
- 3) Long ago Enoch described these men and prophesied their divine destruction.
- 4) Words to the faithful.