

Counterfeiters, Con Artists (and the Consummate Consumer)

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Counterfeiters, Con Artists (and the Consummate Consumer)

If you were a counterfeiter, wouldn't you love to ply your trade in a country where there was so much counterfeit currency in circulation that nobody knew how to distinguish between the real and the fake? Anybody with a bare minimum of artistic ability could print up a bundle in the morning and shop all day. I wonder how long it would be before money wasn't worth much. What do you think? Would you readily accept a dollar in exchange for a full day's work if you knew there was a good possibility it was fake? I guess if you weren't all that concerned with ethical issues, it wouldn't matter to you, would it? After all, if everybody was readily accepting fake currency, you could just pass it along to the next guy. Not a bad deal, huh? You might even get into counterfeiting yourself. Why not? Nobody knows for sure what's genuine, and they're all willing to accept a reasonably close facsimile. Everybody else is doing it. Why not jump right in?

But what would you do if the word was out that the government was going to start calling in the old currency and replacing it with a completely new issue? Would that make a difference? I guess that would depend on whether you actually believed the government was going to act, and that in turn might depend on how long the government had allowed the current situation to exist. Maybe you would just continue accepting and passing bad currency. But then again, it might be smart to start checking to make sure the currency you had was genuine.

By the way, have you taken a look at your religious beliefs lately? Did it ever occur to you that your religious beliefs might be a shade off to the side of half-truth or lie? I mean, did you ever consider that you might be hanging your hopes of eternal bliss on some-

thing as phony as a three dollar bill? How would you know for sure? Are you certain some essential theological doctrine isn't either completely missing or irreparably damaged? How would you know if it was? You wouldn't? Now don't tell me you're pinning your hopes of eternal bliss on some certain set of beliefs and you have no way of knowing whether or not they are seriously flawed, maybe even completely false?

Let me put it this way: Have you ever considered the fact that your soul might be well on its way to hell in a hand basket of Satan's own making? Oh, you haven't? Well, what makes you so certain that it isn't? It seems to me that there are more versions of the "truth" out there than there are flavors of dirt. Jesus said "the Truth shall make you free" (John 8:32), but with everybody arguing in favor of this "truth" or that one, how do you know for certain that what you believe is actually the Truth? Maybe you aren't really free; maybe you just think you are. How would you know for sure?

I've said this before, but I think it bears repeating. *Salvation by faith is a valid doctrine only if what one believes is true. Faith in a half-truth or a lie has never, and will never, save anyone.* Oh, I see, now we have an objection from the peanut gallery. You don't think that's so, do you? Well then, I'll just choose to believe that Judas died for my sin and Jesus Christ was a traitor. Oh, now it seems the shoe is on the other foot. You won't buy that either. Well, logic is logic. You can't have it both ways. If I can't believe anything and everything and still be saved, there must be a certain amount of Truth that one must believe to be saved. That means what you believe does make a difference after all.

Oh, now you're saying that what we believe must be in accord with the message of Scripture. That's good. Now we're back to talking about Satan's hand

basket. If what we believe must be in accord with the message of Scripture, we had all better make sure we understand the *true* message of Scripture, or our soul may very well be in that hand basket along with the souls of all the other heathen around the world. One other thing, just in case you forgot, the Scriptures include the Old Testament Scriptures as well as the New Testament Scriptures. Some people tend to forget that, so I thought I'd just make sure we're on common ground.

I assume that you also understand that what we believe to be saved must be the Truth, and nothing but the Truth. Otherwise, there could be no salvation by faith because what we believe would be a half-truth or a lie. (I didn't want you to think I was agreeing with the notion that some half-baked, half-truth was perfectly acceptable, or that two acceptable versions of the one Truth of Scripture could serve equally as well.) Excuse me for a moment. I just want to say good-bye to those dearly departed scoffers who left our discussion because they don't think any one Truth concerning the message of Scripture is attainable. I guess we know whose hand basket they're in, don't we?

Now that we've agreed salvation by faith has validity only if what we believe is true, let's talk a bit about the *what*—the content—of faith. Can you believe that theologians don't even consider the what of faith when they discuss this passage:

What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for {their} body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, {being} by itself. But someone may {well} say, "You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works,

and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For just as the body without {the} spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

(James 2:14–26)

Isn't that amazing? Theologians argue back and forth about what James has said about faith and works, yet they miss the point entirely because they fail to comprehend that James is talking about *what* Christians believe. You see, James began his discussion of faith and works at the end of the first chapter when he said this:

Therefore putting aside all filthiness and {all} that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

(James 1:21–22)

Did you understand what he said? He first exhorted his readers to "receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls." That's the essence of salvation by faith. We "receive the word" by believing it. But then he said those who hear "the word" and don't do "the word" "delude themselves." That makes me wonder what he means by "the word." Whatever he had in mind, it had to be what James believed and taught, not what somebody else before or since believed and taught. You know what I mean? "The word" certainly had to have a definite content, and only what James believed can qualify as the content of "the word" he had in mind.

Did you also notice what he said about people who "delude themselves"? Do you know what that means? It means they persuade themselves into believing something that isn't true, in this case, something that is not a part of "the word" James has referred to. How do I know that? Because the Greek term James uses here is the same Greek term that the Apostle Paul used when he wrote the following:

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf, and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in

love, and {attaining} to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, {resulting} in a true knowledge of God's mystery, {that is,} Christ {Himself}, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one may delude you with persuasive argument.

(Colossians 2:1–4)

It should be obvious that James is talking about people who have heard “the word” yet “delude themselves” into believing something that isn’t true, something that isn’t a part of “the word” James believed and taught. I wonder what he had in mind. Wouldn’t it be something if he goes right on and explains what these people believe that isn’t true? That would be something, wouldn’t it? I mean, most people read the Scriptures as though they are a sequential series of “proof texts” that can be taken out of context when, in truth, the writer of Scripture is always trying to say something that ties together with the rest of what he says and makes sense only in the total context of his work. We too often miss the point of the author because we’re too busy looking for one or two verses to “prove” what we want to believe. So let’s take it slow and easy and look closely at what James wrote immediately after he mentioned people who “delude themselves”:

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for {once} he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the {law} of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does. If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his {own} heart, this man's religion is worthless. This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of {our} God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, {and} to keep oneself unstained by the world.

(James 1:23–27)

Isn’t that something? There it is right there, tucked away in that last verse. James says “pure and undefiled religion” is “to keep oneself unstained by the world.” I doubt you ever heard that part of that verse emphasized, did you? No, I don’t imagine you have.

Most people are willing to talk about visiting orphans and widows. That’s not threatening to them because it’s an external behavior that can be taken as a fine example of the type of behavior expected of Christians. But that “unstained by the world” notion is a bit far out for some. It gets into “holy roller” talk. Yet it agrees with what James said when he began this section:

Therefore putting aside all filthiness and {all} that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

(James 1:21)

Now, imagine that! After telling us to “put aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness,” James has reminded us that if we have a “pure religion,” we’ll keep ourselves “unstained by the world.” That’s a far cry from the “easy-believism” you hear preached from the pulpit today, isn’t it? Those “sleazy-believism” advocates are quick to tell you what we “should do” or “would do” if only we “could do” what God requires. Then they conclude by affirming it’s too bad we’re just human and have to keep on sinning, so God will have to settle for less than the ideal.

Christians don’t talk much about holiness any more, do they? Do you know why? Because everybody thinks (did you catch that? I said “everybody thinks”) all you have to do to be saved is believe. They forget that what you believe makes a whale of a difference in what you do. That’s what James is talking about here. He’s referring to people who have heard “the word” and then “deluded themselves” into believing they can get by with giving God less than He requires.

James knew what a lot of “Christians” today refuse to believe: God demands holiness—perfect holiness. But I don’t want to emphasize that too much. It might offend a few readers who want to deny that what you believe determines what you do. If they believed God demanded perfect obedience, they’d come up with it. However, I’m getting ahead of myself. James says that himself a little bit later.

Did you hear what James said about the person who “deceives his own heart?” He said “this man’s religion is worthless.” He was talking about the person who can’t control what he says. I’m sure he would have said the same thing about Christian folk today who just can’t quit fornicating, lying, cheating (on their taxes), stealing (from God and man), and a whole long

list of other things that God must consider just as bad as, if not worse than, loose lips. You know the type of “Christians” I’m talking about? They can’t give up all the things Christians aren’t supposed to do, like gossiping about others.

But then maybe you don’t know anything about all those things that Christians aren’t supposed to do. I don’t doubt some of you haven’t heard. It’s not fashionable to talk about sin nowadays. It’s almost as if Christians don’t have to worry about that little three-letter word. They just assume God knows and understands they were made to sin. What is it they say? “After all, we’re only human.” Far be it from most Christians to confess their sin and seek forgiveness. That’s too archaic and unsophisticated for the modern mind.

It’s obvious that gossip and other sins of the tongue can sometimes be extremely hurtful to others. But what James mentions next seems to be an even more benign sin. He wants to talk about “the sin” of showing partiality. Look at what he says:

*My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with {an attitude of} personal favoritism. For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, “You sit here in a good place,” and you say to the poor man, “You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,” have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world {to be} rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?
(James 2:1–7)*

There’s an interesting bit of parabolic imagery behind his mention of “judges with evil motives.” I have explained the role of the judges of Israel in Volume 1 of *The Mystery of Scripture*. Suffice it to say for now that judging others fairly is a fundamental characteristic of a righteous person. James is merely saying that, if you are a righteous person, you will treat people fairly and won’t make distinctions based on social sta-

tus. But then he goes further and makes a statement that is all too easy to overlook:

*If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,” you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin {and} are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one {point,} he has become guilty of all.
(James 2:8–10)*

It’s rather difficult to get around his point-blank charge. He bluntly says, “if you show partiality, you are committing sin.” Now doesn’t that knock your socks off? I mean, he has the audacity to tell me that showering attention on some fat cat while at the same time making poor folks sit in the cheap seats is sin? My! My! How much more stringent could Christianity get? That must be why that statement has been ignored. If we claimed showing partiality was a sin, we would be getting into “legalism.” And we all know that won’t do, don’t we?

In case some of you have been living on the moon, “legalism” is a code word “Christians” use to demean any view that can be taken to mean the opposite of salvation by faith alone. And for the benefit of you “trekkies” who have recently returned from an intergalactic mission, salvation by faith alone is today taken to mean you don’t have to do anything to be saved; all you have to do is believe. In other words, “legalism” is usually taken to refer to any belief that God requires anything more than “faith.” The trouble with that understanding of the doctrine of salvation by faith, which is not addressed by its adherents, is quite simple (That’s why we’re discussing it here. I can’t deal with difficult topics in this short space.): *What you believe makes a big difference in what you do.*

What if “the word” James had in mind required the Christian to live a holy life? That would mean if you didn’t believe Christians had to live a holy life, you wouldn’t be believing the same “word” that James believed, would you? Moreover, if salvation by faith is only valid if you believe the Truth, and “the word” James believed is the Truth, you would be well on your way to hell right now, wouldn’t you? Your faith would be as worthless as hair on a bowling ball, wouldn’t it? And all because you believed a lie. What a waste!

But doesn't that present us with a fine conundrum? If "the word" James believed requires us to do something and we don't do it, we must not really believe "the word" because we aren't living according to "the word" we say we believe. Does that sound strangely like what James says later about faith and works? It should. That is, in fact, precisely what he is saying.

Yet on the other side of the conundrum, if salvation is attained by faith, i.e., belief in "the word" alone, and if the Truth of "the word" James has in mind requires Christians to do something to be saved, then salvation must not be by faith alone. Salvation must depend on both faith and works. That sounds serious! Salvation by faith alone is, according to Protestant theology at least, one of the most fundamental doctrines of Christianity. So any doctrine of salvation by faith that also requires the believer to work for salvation just won't do. We have to find some way out of this fine mess. Maybe this is too difficult a topic for this short space after all. What do you think? Think about it while I dig myself in a bit deeper.

The "sleazy-believism" view that faith (belief) alone is sufficient for salvation, i.e., that the Christian doesn't have to measure up in any way by living a holy life, has already run smack into what James said about "pure religion." He said it means "to keep oneself unstained by the world," and anyone who doesn't do that has a "worthless" religion. But notice what he says next:

For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by {the} law of liberty. For judgment {will be} merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.
(James 2:11-13)

Don't that beat all? Correct me if I'm wrong, but James apparently believed Christians were still obligated to keep the Ten Commandments. Come to think of it, Christians still believe that. At least I think so. Last time I checked, Christians still thought murder was a sin. However, as I remember, some considered adultery to be somewhere in between a sin and a foible. I don't know exactly what to make of that. I thought black was

black and white was white. Some seem to think everything is a shade of gray.

But I guess if Christians still think murder is a sin, there must be at least one thing you have to do to be saved. (Refraining from murder, that is.) If that be so, it sounds to me like those Christians who believe they must refrain from murder must be into "legalism." (That argument was lost on the "sleazy-believers." Their response: "But God will save even serial killers if they believe." Don't bother trying to tell them that's not the point. They wouldn't get it anyway.)

The Perfect Law of Liberty

Did you happen to notice James mentioned the "law of liberty" again? He talked about that "law" once before, in the first chapter (v. 25). There, he called it "the perfect law." And he even said the Christian is supposed to "abide by it." Actually, that isn't what the Greek text says. It says simply "remain," but the translator, not understanding what "perfect law" James had in mind, translated the Greek text the best he knew how. James was *talking about The Apostolic Teaching*. He also calls it "the word" and says the one who hears "the word" and doesn't do it "is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror." Then, in completing the analogy, he says:

But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the {law} of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does.
(James 1:25)

His point is one you would do well to remember. Only by "remaining" or "abiding" within the limited confines of the Truth of *The Apostolic Teaching* is it possible to meet the stringent requirements God has set forth. Why? Because, as I've said before, and as I will undoubtedly say time and time again, *what* you believe determines *what* you do. If you believe *The Teaching*, you will act in accordance with that *Teaching*. That's what James was *talking about* when he wrote the following:

What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be

filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for {their} body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, {being} by itself. But someone may {well} say, "You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For just as the body without {the} spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

(James 2:14–26)

Did it ever occur to you that the "work" James mentions in this passage is a somewhat meager act of kindness? Not many would turn away someone in desperate need of food and clothing. So what's his point? Just this: Talk is cheap. If you don't act in accordance with what you say you believe, you don't believe what you say you believe. Why? Because *what* we believe determines *what* we do. Refute that if you think you can. But when you do, don't forget to notify the psychiatric profession. They need to know that the basis they use for counseling emotionally disturbed individuals is seriously flawed.

Did you know that Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation, thought the above passage from the Book of James contradicted the notion of salvation by faith? He was so completely averse to anything that might be used to refute that essential doctrine that he called the Book of James "an epistle of straw." He can be forgiven in that assessment. You must understand he was up against a Roman Catholic hierarchy whose only concession to faith was that you must believe that penance and indulgences could effect salvation—even for the dead. In the face of such a totally works-oriented Christianity, would you look kindly on something that could be interpreted to bolster that position?

Some today still view what James has said in much the same way as Martin Luther did. Isn't that remarkable? They do that because they still cling to the nebulous notion that Christians can believe anything and everything and still be saved. It should be obvious that isn't so, but who's to say? There are so many counterfeit Christian beliefs out there that people assume they are supposed to pick and choose as the fancy hits them. Under such circumstances, who could fault them for getting caught up in such a ridiculous notion?

If what I wrote in the April 1993 issue of *The Voice of Elijah* is true, God will. [Editor: See "Mystics, Meatballs, and the Marvelous Works of God" *The Voice of Elijah*, April 1993.] If the Spirit of the Living God resides within True Believers, they will know the Truth when they hear it, provided they are willing to live according to that Truth. I didn't say that; Jesus did:

Jesus therefore answered them, and said, "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or {whether} I speak from Myself. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him."

(John 7:16–18)

If that's true, it's going to be difficult for anyone to get past God, isn't it? What if you secretly decided to renege on the commitment you made to God when you were born again? You could just choose to believe one of those "easy-believism" versions of Christianity and be done with it, couldn't you? Then you could go on claiming to believe the Truth, all the while spouting Christian clichés like everybody else, and not do anything that God requires.

Does that type of "Christian" sound familiar to you? Does that maybe even sound like you? A person like that is nothing but the consummate consumer. He doesn't want the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth. He just wants a reasonable facsimile, one that will allow him to hide from God, himself, and others. I remind you that James said those who assume God requires nothing of them "delude themselves" and anyone who follows them in that belief "deceives his {own} heart." He also said "this man's religion is worthless." James had in mind people who have heard "the word" yet still choose to believe the Truth of "the

word” requires nothing of them. There are a lot of those folks around today, aren’t there? Too bad for them.

Hindsight is 20/20

Contrary to those who tend to see a refutation of the doctrine of salvation by faith alone in the above passage, James was actually reinforcing that doctrine by stressing the fact that *what* one believes is the essential ingredient in the doctrine of salvation by faith. Do you know why it is the essential ingredient? Because “the true power of the Christian life resides in faith—not faith in the sense of *that* you believe, but faith in the sense of *what* you believe.” Does that quote look familiar to you? Probably not. It does to me. I took it out of one of the articles I wrote for the last issue of this newsletter. (See “Mystics, Meatballs, and the Marvelous Works of God,” *The Voice of Elijah*, April 1993.) I just thought I should use this article to better explain what I meant when I wrote it. I also thought I might make it a permanent quote so that some of you get the point: Faith is Christian faith only if *what* you believe is in accord with the Truth of “the word” James had in mind. Here’s another quote from that article:

Once The Teaching becomes a part of you, i.e., once you firmly believe it, you will act accordingly—as an individual led by the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Now let me ask you a not-so-hypothetical question. What if “the word” James understood provided the one who believed it with the power to live a sinless life? Do you understand what I’m saying? What if, when you believed “the word,” you would thereby be empowered to do what “the word” required. Would works even be an issue? Not at all. “Legalism” would not apply because there would be no effort necessary on the part of the Believer to meet the requirements of “the word.” In fact, the reverse would be the case. The person who didn’t believe “the word” couldn’t do what “the word” required simply because he lacked the power. On the other hand, the person who did believe “the word” would do what “the word” required because, through belief in “the word,” he would gain the power necessary to meet the requirements of “the word.” If that were the case, it would explain a lot about what James has said, wouldn’t it?

Looking at it that way, you can see that James knew the one who believed *The Apostolic Teaching* would demonstrate that belief by living the holy life *The Teaching* requires. He also knew that the one who did not believe *The Apostolic Teaching* would not (just because they could not) demonstrate their belief in “the word” by doing what “the word” requires. That’s why he next mentions those who were responsible for teaching Believers *The Apostolic Teaching*:

Let not many {of you} become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.
(James 3:1)

His point? What you teach determines what the people you teach are going to do, provided they believe what you teach. Therefore, James has given good advice for Christians today. So I ask you: If you’re not sure you know the Truth, why are you teaching others? Do you want to “incur a stricter judgment”?

The Perfect Law

To round out this discussion of salvation by faith, I want to point out a passage that explains the True Believer’s relationship to “the perfect law of liberty” at which James states we should “look intently.” To better understand my explanation here, however, you should have at least a basic understanding of the corporate responsibility that “all Israel” had under the Old Covenant and how that responsibility changed to one of individual responsibility under the terms of the New Covenant. I have already provided that explanation in *Not All Israel Is Israel* (pp. 55–103, 131–155). In that explanation, I included a couple of references to the following passage, although I did not quote the text in full. Interestingly, it is the longest single passage of the Old Testament quoted in the New Testament:

For if that first {covenant} had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them, He says,
“BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD,
WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT
WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND
WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH;
NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE
WITH THEIR FATHERS

ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND
 TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT;
 FOR THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT,
 AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD,
 FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE
 WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL
 AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD:
 I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS,
 AND I WILL WRITE THEM UPON THEIR HEARTS.
 AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD,
 AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE,
 AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN,
 AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, 'KNOW THE LORD,'
 FOR ALL SHALL KNOW ME,
 FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM,
 FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES,
 AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE."
 When He said, "A new {covenant}," He has made the
 first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and
 growing old is ready to disappear.
 (Hebrews 8:7–13)

It's obvious that the writer of the Book of Hebrews would have us understand Jeremiah is talking about God's relationship with His People under the terms of the New Covenant. Since I've already explained the way in which the New Covenant differed from the Old Covenant in *Not All Israel Is Israel*, I won't go into detail here. Just to summarize, however, the Prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel tell us that under the terms of the New Covenant, instead of God dwelling among His People, He would dwell in each one of His people. They also say His dwelling place within the individual would be in a "new heart," in a "new spirit," as well as in the "law" of Moses "written on the heart."

As I explained in *Not All Israel Is Israel*, the "law" of Moses is the *Torah* of Moses, and the word *torah* means "teaching" (p. 154, n. 29). Therefore, in this particular passage Jeremiah is telling us that the dwelling place of God within the born-again Believer is going to be the *Torah* of Moses written on the heart, meaning *The Teaching of Moses* written on the heart. That's why he also says one will not have to teach the other how to "know the Lord" because each one will have the Lord dwelling within them as *The Teaching*.

The point is, the "perfect law" that James mentioned in his discussion is the same "law" that Jeremiah

has said the True Believer will have "written on the heart" under the terms of the New Covenant. That's why James says that those who don't do what they are supposed to do "delude themselves," and the one who thinks he is religious but isn't "deceives his own heart." He knows that, for a True Believer, belief in a lie begins with a failure to seek Truth no matter what the cost. In other words, an understanding of the Truth begins by doing exactly what James says. To see yourself for what you are, you have to "look intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty" that resides within you—provided you are a born-again Believer.

The Spirit residing in that bit of Truth you first believed when you were born again will always make your situation known to you—provided you are willing to accept the reality of your situation. Just don't turn away and immediately forget what kind of person you saw yourself to be. If you do that, you'll be one of those whom James says "delude themselves."

How can it be that the Spirit of the Living God resides in *The Teaching* written on the heart of the Believer? Because the Spirit of Jesus Christ is a Word. Is that news to you? Perhaps you didn't hear what John said:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.
 (John 1:1–5)

Maybe you haven't fully understood how you came to be born again. I can tell you quickly: You heard the essential outlines of "the word of Truth" and it came to life in you because you believed it. At least that's what James says:

In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.
 (James 1:18)

But notice what James goes on to say:

{This} you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak {and} slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

(James 1:19–21)

James obviously believed it was necessary not only to be “brought forth by the word of truth,” but also to continue to “receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.” Then he goes on after that to say all the things about people who “delude themselves” and the person who “deceives his {own} heart.” What I said above bears repeating here: “The word implanted” that James refers to here is the same “law” —“teaching”—that Jeremiah understood would be “written on the heart.” The parabolic imagery is different, but the concept remains the same. You will be saved by faith, but only by faith in the Truth, and by faith in nothing but the Truth. Your faith in a lie is completely ineffectual, no matter how firmly you believe it. The Truth is what saves.

So I ask you: What if you had opportunity to hear the Truth and chose not to believe it? That would be something, wouldn't it? If what Jesus said about “knowing of the teaching” is true and you choose to believe a lie, it is only because, as Isaiah said, you have chosen to make falsehood your refuge and have concealed yourself with deception (Is. 28:15b). (See “Watching Ducks Sashaying ‘Round the CornerStone,” *The Voice of Elijah*, April 1993.) Therefore, if you hear the Truth and believe a lie, you have nobody to blame but yourself, because the Holy Spirit within you will never confirm the truth of a lie.

How Much Truth is Truth?

For James, “the word” he had in mind was the totality of *The Apostolic Teaching*. But as I explained in the articles written for the January 1993 issue of *The Voice of Elijah*, the Early Church gave up the idioms and *parabolic imagery* of *The Apostolic Teaching* around A.D. 200. So what Truth have True Believers had during the 1,800 years since? That's an interesting question, isn't it?

Consider this: Around A.D. 200, the Truth of *The Apostolic Teaching* was broken up—removed from its original framework of Hebrew idioms and *parabolic imagery*—so that it could be artificially set into the

framework of Greek philosophy. Since that time, bits and pieces of Truth have been available in the vessels—logical categories of thought—provided by Greek philosophy. Notice that I said, “Since that time, bits and pieces of Truth have been available.” Elements of the Truth have always been known to some in the Church. It's just that a coherent presentation of the Truth has not been available. So I ask you: If we are going to be saved by faith in the Truth, how much Truth does it take to be saved? That's just another way of asking: How much Truth does it take to be Truth? The answer is obvious. You can be saved with only a bare minimum of the Truth. But that's not the issue. You see, it's not even a question of whether you believe a lie. We all believe some things that aren't true. Our knowledge of the Truth is incomplete just as Paul said:

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known.

(1 Corinthians 13:12)

The only issue at stake is whether, when you hear the Truth, you reject it in order to believe a lie. That's because, as far as God is concerned, the single most important issue involved in salvation by faith has always been whether, when given opportunity, one rejects the Truth in favor of a lie. Does that make sense? You can believe a lie and still be saved, as long as you have not rejected the Truth in order to believe that lie. That's the difficulty with believing the lie that says *The Teaching* requires nothing of you. You can't believe that lie and still believe the Truth because it flatly contradicts the essentials of God's Truth. The sole purpose of that lie is to allow you to hide from the Truth of God by “deluding yourself” and “deceiving your own heart.” That's why James confronts it head on.

So what are you going to do now? I'll tell you forthrightly: What you have read here is the Truth. However, some of you don't think it's possible to know the Truth today, do you? That's why you don't believe me, isn't it? Well, that's your choice. The sad fact is Isaiah said your refuge is going to be swept away (Is. 28:17). So I've done my part; the ball is now in your court. ■