

James

Chapter One

Commentary by Dr. Paul Dodson

Introduction

The author identifies himself as James (1:1); he was probably the brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15). Four men in the NT have this name. The author of this letter could not have been the apostle James, who died too early (a.d. 44) to have written it. The other two men named James had neither the stature nor the influence that the writer of this letter had.

James was one of several brothers of Christ, probably the oldest since he heads the list in Mt 13:55. At first he did not believe in Jesus and even challenged him and misunderstood his mission (Jn 7:2-5).

Later he became very prominent in the church:

He was one of the select individuals Christ appeared to after his resurrection (1 Co. 15:7;).

Paul called him a "pillar" of the church (Gal. 2:9).

Paul, on his first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem, saw James (Gal 1:19).

Paul did the same on his last visit (Acts 21:18).

When Peter was rescued from prison, he told his friends to tell James (Acts 12:17).

James was a leader in the important council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:13).

Jude could identify himself simply as "a brother of James" (Jude 1:1), so well known was James. He was martyred c. a.d. 62.

Date

1. Some date the letter in the early 60s. There are indications, however, that it was written before a.d. 50:
2. Its distinctively Jewish nature suggests that it was composed when the church was still predominantly Jewish.
3. It reflects a simple church order -- officers of the church are called "elders" (5:14) and "teachers" (3:1).

4. No reference is made to the controversy over Gentile circumcision.
5. The Greek term *synagoge* ("synagogue" or "meeting") is used to designate the meeting or meeting place of the church (2:2).

If this early dating is correct, this letter is the earliest of all the NT writings -- with the possible exception of Galatians.

Recipients

The recipients are identified explicitly only in 1:1: "the twelve tribes scattered among the nations." Some hold that this expression refers to Christians in general, but the term "twelve tribes" would more naturally apply to Jewish Christians. Furthermore, a Jewish audience would be more in keeping with the obviously Jewish nature of the letter (e.g., the use of the Hebrew title for God, *kyrios sabaoth*, "Lord Almighty," 5:4). That the recipients were Christians is clear from 2:1; 5:7-8.

It has been plausibly suggested that these were believers from the early Jerusalem church who, after Stephen's death, were scattered as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Syrian Antioch (see Act 8:1; 11:19 and notes). This would account for James's references to trials and oppression, his intimate knowledge of the readers and the authoritative nature of the letter. As leader of the Jerusalem church, James wrote as pastor to instruct and encourage his dispersed people in the face of their difficulties (see essay, p. 2539).

Distinctive Characteristics

Characteristics that make the letter distinctive are:

- (1) its unmistakably Jewish nature;
- (2) its emphasis on vital Christianity, characterized by good deeds and a faith that works (genuine faith must and will be accompanied by a consistent lifestyle);
- (3) its simple organization;
- (4) its familiarity with Jesus' teachings preserved in the Sermon on the Mount (compare 2:5 with Mt 5:3; 3:10-12 with Mt 7:15-20; 3:18 with Mt 5:9; 5:2-3 with Mt 6:19-20; 5:12 with Mt 5:33-37);
- (5) its similarity to OT wisdom writings such as Proverbs
- (6) its excellent Greek.

Book of James

Lesson Two
James 1:1-18

Greeting

1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

Testing of Your Faith

2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers (Different) temptations;

3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect (complete, mature) and entire, wanting nothing.

5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

7 For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

8 A double minded (change your mind often, or be easily swayed) man is unstable in all his ways.

(See also Ephesians 4:14)

9 Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:

10 But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.

11 For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

12 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

(This does not say that God will not test us, but there is a difference between "tempting" and "testing". Tempting is when you say or act in such a way as to get a person to respond in a certain way...normally an evil response. Testing is allowing a person to act or respond in a way that seems right to them, for the purpose of showing them where they are at.)

14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

(If you don't have a fleshly desire for something, it is very hard to be tempted in that area. So, when you find yourself tempted, it is showing a fleshly lust in that area of your life)

15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

(Temptation is not sin. But when you are tempted in an area of your life, and fleshly lust is triggered, one of two things will happen. Either you will reject that temptation and put down the lust of your flesh, or you will embrace it (conceived) and then it becomes sin. And of course the wages of sin is death. Do not despise this testing as it will always bring forth a realization of where you are at and what you need to work on.)

16 Do not err, my beloved brethren.

17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, (changing.. See also Malachi 3:6) neither shadow of turning.

18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

(By Himself He will bring us back to Him so that we will be a type of first fruit of His creation)

Book of James

Lesson Three
James 1:19-27

Hearing and Doing the Word

19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

(And this is where many people go wrong. They get everything turned around and spend all their time speaking, and very little time listening. In James 3:1 we are told to that we should not strive to be "masters". This word literally means "instructor". God is telling us in both verses that we need to do a lot more listening than we do talking. A God called teacher is not someone who "wants" to teach. We have a lot of them. But most have not done any listening and so they are teaching what they "think" or "feel", but not what God says. A true God called teacher is someone who never saw it coming. They listened, they studied, they learned, and they lived God's Word, and then one day, they woke up and God had put them into a teaching situation. Now, it is time for them to talk....to share, to impart onto others what God has taught them. Be very careful who you listen to. Make sure they have been approved by God.)

20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

(And then the second thing that is mentioned in these verses is "slow to wrath". What does "wrath" have to do with listening and talking? Well, a word study of the word "wrath" here will clarify the matter. In these verses, "wrath" literally means, "desire, as excitedly reaching for something... violent passion...anger". So in verse nineteen, God is saying to be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to passionately desire something to the point it brings out violent and anger actions. And in verse twenty we are told that this type of desire will not exalt the righteousness of God. Be patient, let God direct you in the direction He wants. Let God develop His gifts in you, and then let Him open up the doors He wants you to go through.)

21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity (abundance) of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

(Any time you see the word "wherefore" at the beginning of a verse, you must look to the previous verses to see what it is there for. In this case, we need to lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness BECAUSE, this wrath (ungodly desires) do not bring forth God's righteousness. Remember, when you see the word "wherefore", look to see what it's there for. And then the second part of verse twenty-one tells us to let God's word become part of us to the point it saves our souls. If you remember from lesson one, this letter was written to the Twelve Tribes of Israel...not to the Church. So James is literally talking about salvation in the later part of this verse. It is God's Word that brings about salvation, and only God's Word. Read Romans 10:17)

22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

(If you are not "living" God's Word, you are only a hearer and you are deceiving yourself. This brings us to another point. In verse nineteen we are told to be swift to "hear", but in verse twenty-two we are told not to just "hear" but to be "doers". The point is, when we "hear", we need to "listen". You can "hear" without actually listening. The way to tell the difference is simple. If what you heard makes an

impact on your life, then you were listening. If it didn't, you are just a hearer, and not a listener. God is calling you to listen to what you hear. But it to work in your life, and be a doer of the Word.)

23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

(Notice James says "perfect law of liberty", not "perfect law". The law kills, but the liberty we have in God's Grace brings life. We do not live under law anymore, but under Grace. Jesus fulfilled the law, and in Him, we have to.)

26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

(And now James turns from the "hearing" part of verse Nineteen to the "speaking" part. He doesn't have much to say about speaking other than this, control your tongue. If you don't, you have deceived yourself and your "pious religion" in useless. Speak little, and when you do, make absolute certain it is Biblically correct and of God.)

27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

(And in closing this chapter, James reminds us that the only good religion is the one that takes care of those around you in need, AND, creates within you yourself a godly life. Pure religion is not in big fancy churches, flowery speeches, being around all kinds of fancy people, or dressing a certain way. Pure religion before God is simply "love thy neighbor as you love yourself, and love God with all your being)

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Lesson Four
James 2:1-13

The Sin of Partiality

1 My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.

2 For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;

3 And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:

4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?

5 Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?

6 But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?

7 Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?

8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:

9 But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

(God died for all people. He loves all people, and He commands us to love all people. We should not look on the outward appearance, but see people the way God sees them, lost and in need of a Saviour. We know who that Saviour is, and we should concern ourselves with sharing Him with everyone)

10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

(This is a very important concept to understand. The law of God is not a bunch of individual laws, but is one law, comprised of many statements. You don't break one law when you sin, but you break the whole law as a single unit. This is why it does not matter if you have sinned one time or a million times, you are still a sinner and in need of a Saviour just as much as the next person. One sin or a million sins, you are a law breaker and on your way to hell without Jesus Christ. As humans, we have a tendency to look at others and think "I am better then they are" because they sin differently then I do. But God looks at us and says, "for all have sinned and come short of my glory").

11 For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.

12 So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

13 For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

Lesson Five
James 2:14-26

Faith Without Works Is Dead

14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

(Now we come to a portion of Scripture that is highly misunderstood. Many use this portion of James to argue works based salvation.)

15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

(This is not arguing that Works saves a person. What James is saying is that if you have the faith that leads to salvation, it will produce godly works in you. In other words, salvation produces works, works does NOT produce salvation. Read Ephesians 2:8,9)

18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

(Believing in God is not enough. Even Satan believes. True faith requires action. It requires repentance. And faith that saves produces a new birth. Read also 2 Cor. 5:17)

20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

(Again, verse 21 would seem to indicate that Abraham was saved by his works, but you can not take one verse and make a doctrine out of it. Verse 22 goes on to say that his works completed his faith. The word "perfect" at the end of verse 22 means "complete". And then verse 23 rounds out the discussion with "Abraham BELIEVED God and it was imputed unto him for righteousness". So, Abraham was saved by his faith in God just like we are today. That faith brought about godly works, which completed, or verified his salvation.)

24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

25 Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?

26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

(These verses can seem as if James is advocating that “works” justifies us. But that is not what he is saying. He is saying that true faith will produce godly works. Superficial, or fleshly faith will not produce godly works. So, if there is “faith” but no works, there is no faith. If there is works with no faith, there is no godly works. True faith, is always accompanied by true godly works.)

Lesson Six
James 3:1-12

Taming the Tongue

1 My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

("Masters" means "teachers..instructor". James tells us again in this verse that we should not run after being a teacher or instructor. The reason is because God is going to judge those who preach and teach to a much higher standard. If you are not absolutely certain God has called you into this type of work, don't do it. But, if God's call is upon you, then study, learn, prepare, and walk boldly forward.)

2 For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

3 Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.

4 Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.

5 Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

7 For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:

8 But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?

12 Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

(James gives us a very vivid picture of how deadly the tongue is. A word out of place, a word unspoken, or a word too many spoken can make the difference between peace and war. Once spoken, it can never be taken back. Only Spirit God within us can tame the tongue.)

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Lesson Seven
James 3:13-18

Wisdom from Above

13 Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

"Conversation" means behavior. Let your lifestyle do the talking for you. You're not wise because you say you are, you're wise because others see wisdom in you. You're not a Christian because you say you are, you are a Christian if others see Christ in you. Let your good behaviour (life style) show godly wisdom.

14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

15 This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

"This wisdom" is referring to earthly wisdom that leads to strife and bitterness. Godly wisdom will always lead to peace and goodness.

16 For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

Nothing good comes from strife. Ever.

17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

How can you tell if something is of God? What kind of fruit does it produce. Does it produce strife and envy and confusion and evil works? It is not of God. If it is of God, righteousness and peace, and gentleness will be produced.

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Lesson Eight
James 4:1-12

Warning Against Worldliness

1 From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?

All wars and fighting comes from ungodly lust within the hearts of mankind. Whether it be lusting after the oil in another land, lusting after the power gained, or whatever one may think they will gain, it always comes from within the heart.

2 Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.

3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

These two verses seem to imply that there is a right motive to asking God for things, and there is a wrong motive. If your asking to appease the lust of your heart for something, this is asking amiss and God is not going to answer. However, asking that God may be glorified would be a much godlier motive for asking.

4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

The word "friendship" here means fondness. "World" refers to the world system, and "enmity" means hatred. So, being fond or loving the way this world system operates is hatred towards God. This world is in complete opposition to God. It stands against everything of God. You can not love evil and good... light and darkness. You can not love two masters. You either love God or you love this wicked world...but you can not love both.

5 Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?

6 But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Notice here in verse 7 that you must do two things to get Satan off your back...First, Submit to God.

You must first be a child of God. Repent and trusting in Christ. Then, you must resist the devil. "Resist" means to stand against. You must take a stand against Satan and the works of darkness. This is an active stance...Faith in action. Submit to God, resist the devil AND THEN, and only then will he flee from you. But be on guard, for satan walks around as a roaring lion, seeking whom he can destroy. He will be back, and when he does come back, you better still be resisting.

8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.

10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

Humble yourself and God will lift you up. Exalt yourself and God will humble you.

11 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.

12 There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?

This is speaking of judging another person. We are to make righteous judgments. This is judging the actions and behaviors if they are of God or not. To say murder is a sin is a judgment of the action. To say a specific person is going to hell because they killed someone is a judgment of the person. We can not judge the person, only the action. And then, when we do judge the action, it must always be in light of God's Word.

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Lesson Nine
James 4:13-17

Boasting About Tomorrow

13 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:

14 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.

15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

Never assume something. You have no control over tomorrow, and do not know what lies ahead. Always put it in God's hands.... Trust His wisdom, and if things don't work out the way you think it should, praise God that He knows best.

16 But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.

You have something to boast about? Give God all the glory. It is God who gives the strength, the wisdom, the ability, the opportunity.

17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

God opens the doors for opportunities to do good. He gives you the means to do good for others. To keep that blessing to yourself is to rob God of His blessings. This is a sin. Always, if it is in your power to do good, do it. God will repay so much more.

Book of James

Lesson Ten
James 5:1-12

Warning to the Rich

1 Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.

God tells us to lay up riches in heaven where moths can't eat them and thieves can't steal them. This would consist of our good works in the Lords name, good works that last.

2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten.

3 Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.

4 Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.

5 Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter.

6 Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.

Patience in Suffering

7 Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.

8 Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

9 Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.

10 Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.

11 Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

12 But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

This portion of James is pretty much explanatory. Earthly riches do not last forever. Only what we store up in Heaven will last. Evil men store up riches on earth. Godly men store up riches in Heaven. And, then, James encourages us to endure. Don't get upset when others may have more than us. They have their reward. Ours is coming.

Book of James

Lesson Eleven
James 5:13-20

The Prayer of Faith

13 Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

14 Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

This verse may seem out of place among other verses that talk about confessing sins. However, it is a biblical fact that sin causes sickness. Not all sickness is because of sin in your life, but all sickness is due to the fact we live in a sin cursed world. Thus submitting yourself to God, being prayed over and anointed shall, as verse 15 tells us, "save the sick". And, the sins that caused the sickness will be forgiven.

15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

The word "confess" means to acknowledge. It does not mean to list all your sins by name. "Confess your faults one to another" is admitting to each other you are a sinner in need of a Saviour. It does no good to go around and start naming sins to everyone. This can give place to satan and stir up far more problems than it ever could solve. But, when you agree with God that you are a sinner, and you openly confess this to others, this allows the Holy Spirit room to move in your life and bring about the cleansing each of us need.

17 Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

19 Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him;

20 Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

This is not saying that you can have sins forgiven by leading people to Christ. This is talking about the sins of those who are saved. Their multitude of sins are forgiven.