



## ***Be Ye Doers of the Word***

### **Rules & Regulations**

#### **Class Three**

*It is as equally hard for us as it was for the Jews to truly understand that our works don't save us*

#### **• SLIDE**

- We have attempted to refocus our eyes to the idea that the Message of James, and that of Jesus as well, would have been a **Radical & Different** message for the Jews of his day
  - And hopefully, it challenges us to look at our faith in a different way also
- We were introduced to the foil in the life story of Jesus, the Pharisees, and their legalistic approach to religion
  - And hopefully, we've received a warning from James to not follow in the Pharisees footsteps, even though that is a natural tendency for humans

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- We talked yesterday about the concept of **Faith & Works**
  - Not Faith VS. Works, but Faith & Works
- James complements the teachings of Paul, and they both together show us that it is not a matter of one VS. the other...
- It's NOT a matter of either earning your way into the Kingdom by your good works

- Or, not doing any good works at all, because you think that God is going to give you eternal life no matter what you do here on earth
- The concept of Faith & Works that James shows us is that we are motivated to good works **BECAUSE** of the salvation we have received through Faith
- We obey our Heavenly Father and strive to fill our lives with works that please Him because we love Him for the great gift of mercy that He has given us
- We wouldn't even imagine that we could ever do enough to earn salvation
  - But, we also couldn't imagine a life not filled with good works, because the wonderful gift that we have been given inspires us to give back
- Today, we would like to take a moment, and think a little further about the idea of Faith & Works
- I want to talk about one of the children of a works-based, legalistic approach to religion

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- I want to talk a bit today about **Rules & Regulations**
- Although Catholic tradition holds Peter to be the leader of the first Ecclesia in Jerusalem, it is fairly well supported and commonly believed among Bible Students that it was, in fact, **James**, the brother of Jesus, who shepherded the early flock at Jerusalem
- Josephus records that James died by stoning in AD 62, so we know that this letter was written sometime before that date
- Historically, we know that the Council of Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15 occurred somewhere around AD 49
- The best estimate is that James' letter was written sometime shortly before that date, with most scholars putting it about 48 AD
- We don't know exactly when it was written
- But, we do know, exactly, WHO James was writing to:

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- James 1:1 KJV

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

- It makes sense that this Brother with several years of pastoral experience, from an Ecclesia well-respected by the Jews would take the task of writing to the Jews who had been scattered away from Jerusalem
- While it had only been about 15 years since the death of the Lord, James is already speaking of persecution
- This was probably not the more general “Christian” persecution that would follow at the hands of the Romans, but most likely persecution related specifically to the fact that these Jews had converted to Christianity
- But, persecution is persecution, isn’t it?
- It doesn’t really matter what the source is, persecution is debilitating and belittling to have your beliefs, your decisions, and ultimately, your lifestyle, ridiculed and demeaned
- Imagine the thing that you hold dearest, the thing that is most important to you, challenged and condemned, beaten and berated until you find yourself considering how important it actually is, and whether or not you should just give it all up in hopes of finding peace
- Driven almost to the point of abandoning your faith
- Persecution is a constant sorrow and pain, a nagging sore that festers and festers and eventually fills your life with sadness until you break under the burden
- And then this letter arrives at your Ecclesia from Jerusalem
- Brother James, the wise elder of the Lord’s first Ecclesia is writing to us in this terrible time of sadness and strife, and he says,

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- James 1:2 NIV

2) **Consider it pure joy**, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds

- Count it all **JOY???** *What is he talking about?*
- We’re being beaten down here
- We’re being pushed into making compromises and decisions that are horrible to have to face
- We are feeling the truths and values that we hold so dear being cast aside by society, and we are being ridiculed and shamed for believing in them

- Why in the world would we consider that to be pure joy?

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- James 1:3-4 NIV

- 3) because you know that the **testing of your faith develops perseverance**.
- 4) Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

- For James, the most important thing is not whether or not people are picking on you
- It's not whether or not you are being prevented from getting promotions at work
- It's not important whether or not your children are being mistreated at school
- Or whether or not your neighbours are speaking malicious gossip about you behind your back
- The important thing is the effect that those things have on you

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- The important thing is the development of your **FAITH**
- What happens outwardly in your life is not as important as what happens inside you

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- Your Circumstances are **TEMPORARY**

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- Your Character will last **FOREVER**
- God is looking to develop your Faith...

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- Every problem that He presents us with is a **character-building** opportunity
- The more difficult it is, the greater the potential for building up our spiritual muscle and moral fiber
- The more difficulties we are asked to face is a reflection for God's love and care for us, not His abandonment of us
- God only disciplines the ones He loves

- That's hard for us to learn, but valuable for us to understand sooner or later
- Character Building is a slow process
- Let's look at that last verse in a modern translation...

#### • SLIDE

- James 1:3-4 (CEV)

- 3) You know that **you learn to endure by having your faith tested.**
- 4) But you must learn to endure everything, so that you will be completely mature and not lacking in anything.

- Whenever we try to avoid or escape the difficulties in life, we short-circuit the process, delay our own spiritual growth, and actually end up with a worse kind of pain...
- The worthless type of pain that accompanies denial and avoidance

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- Character Development is all about praying for God to **CONFORM** you, and not just **COMFORT** you
- God is more concerned about **TRANSFORMING** you into the kind of person that He wants, than **TRANSPORTING** you out of your problems

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- Character Development is **HARD**
- I'm not going to lie to you!
- Bob Lloyd is fond of saying that *"The only thing that likes change is a baby with a dirty diaper."*
- Change **IS** difficult
- And the older we get the harder it gets
- But, it's also important

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- The key to successful **TRANSFORMATION** is to start from the **INSIDE OUT**
- What happens to us on the outside doesn't really matter
- When you look at eternity through God's eyes none of **THIS** really matters

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- What we experience in this life is **NOT** what God intends for us
- God has something much better than this life in mind for us!
- It's a false belief to think that you should somehow be satisfied with this life
- To think that somehow we should learn to ignore the aches in our soul
- It's simply an incorrect understanding of God's message to think that if you somehow live correctly; pray frequently enough; read often enough; attend enough classes; you will be spared the pressures, the worries, and the pains of this life
- This type of thinking doesn't face the painful reality of what's it's like to be an imperfect and sometimes sinful, human being
- Allow yourself to feel the deep longings in your soul that will never be fully satisfied until the Kingdom
- Face the hidden sins in your heart that make it clear how thoroughly unlike Christ you often are
- Let the pain of disappointed longings and the guilt of terrible sins drive you to consider the gospel of God's grace in a new way
- Only then will Christ be able to enter your life deeply and change you from the inside out
- It's all so easy...
- But...

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- We don't **REALLY** want to change, do we?
- It's okay, you can admit it, I feel the same way...
- We don't really want to look too intently into that mirror...
- It's very natural for us to be like the man who ***"beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was."***
- But, what James wants for us is something Radical & Different
  - Something longer lasting
  - Something more permanent

- Remember, James wants us to ***“look into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein”***
- That is what James was talking about in our class yesterday
- We can't just sit there every day doing the daily readings...

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- James 1:22 NIV

22) Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. **Do what it says.**

- We have to **DO** what the Bible says!
- Don't merely come here and listen to what I say...
- Don't merely make pages and pages of notes...

- **But, CHANGE!**

- Become more like what you read!
- Have the courage to really face what is inside of you, and then you will be able to get at it, and with God's help you will be able to change it
- Open up the uncomfortable, the hidden, the forgotten parts of your heart and find out what really is in there
- Because it is what is in **THERE** that shows on the outside
- James does an excellent job of showing us that the source of our problems is on the inside, and not the outside

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- James 1:13-14 NIV

- 13) When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;
- 14) but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

- It's not external forces that cause us to behave the way we do...
- It's our own desires and lusts that motivate us

- It's our own hearts and minds that cause us to act and think the way we do
- The answer is clear, then...
- If we really want to Transform ourselves...

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- If we want to change our **ACTIONS**, we **HAVE** to change our **HEARTS**
- It's simple and it's clear...
- But, it's hard!
- And here is where we usually slip up...
- Here is where our fears, our habits and our traditions get the best of us...
- In all of our human wisdom and intelligence we go about attacking the problem completely backwards

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- Instead of taking the hard effort involved of facing our weakness and **CHANGING** from the inside out, we simply make more **Rules & Regulations**

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- It is an **ERROR** to try to make **RULES** in an attempt to change our **ACTIONS**
- It's natural...
- It's tempting...
- It is the appeal of having things "Black and White" that we find so alluring...
- It's the appeal of having simple commandments to lead our lives, instead of having to simply "live a life for Christ" that trips us up...
- Paul speaks about this clearly in Colossians 2:

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- Colossians 2:20-23 NLT

- 20) You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the evil powers of this world. So **why do you keep on following rules**, such as,
- 21) "Don't handle, don't eat, don't touch."



- 22) Such rules are **mere human teaching** about things that are gone as soon as we use them.
- 23) These rules may **seem wise** because they require **strong devotion**, **humility**, and **severe bodily discipline**. But they have **NO EFFECT** when it comes to conquering a **person's evil thoughts and desires**.

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- **Rules & Regulations don't have any value in restraining fleshly indulgence!**

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- **Rules & Regulations** have **NO EFFECT** in conquering a **person's evil thoughts and desires**

- When we say, "The Law was a Schoolmaster to bring us to Christ", what do we really mean by that?
- The Law with it's complex nature was supposed to bring us to realize one thing...
- That we cannot legislate righteousness...

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- We **CANNOT** regulate sin...
- The Law was supposed to teach us that we desperately need forgiveness and grace through our Lord Jesus Christ
- That we have to change ourselves from the inside out, and no amount of Rules & Regulations, whether laid down from God or devised from Men are going to accomplish that
- Now here is the tricky part...
- Pay close attention, because I don't want to get disfellowshipped...
- I am not concluding, therefore, that we shouldn't have any Rules
- The grace that we have received from God does not give us freedom to sin
- This is the tension that exists in a Christian's life

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- This tension exists because Human Beings are complex, and things are never "Black and White"
- Although we want to see things in the terms of either:

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- *Walking with God* or

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- *Not walking with God*

- The reality of the situation is often much more confusing...

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- There are people in the World who have chosen **NOT** to *“Walk with God”*, and yet do **GOOD THINGS**

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- Likewise, we are all too personally familiar with people like ourselves who have chosen to *“Walk with God”*, and yet, occasionally find themselves **SINNING**

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- We have looked at the Life of Abraham in our study of James, and I think that when we look at Abraham’s life, we find this same sort of lesson...
- James refers to Abraham as a “Friend of God”, and we know that his life is recorded for us as an example of Faith
- Abraham was righteous, holy and faithful, and I don’t want to speak poorly of a man that God does not
- And yet, Abraham had his points of weakness...

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- Abraham had *Egypt*
- Remember, there was a famine in the land...
- God had just made spectacular promises to Abraham
  - He was going to make a great nation from Abraham
  - He was going to give this 75-year-old man a child
  - He promised all the land that he could see to him to his seed forever
- God surely wouldn’t have let Abraham die of starvation

- Abraham had an opportunity to show his Faith in God's Promises...

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- Instead, it's recorded that Abraham **"goes down"** to Egypt
  - This is never a sign of spiritual strength
  - Egypt is the world in scriptural terms, and almost always involves "going down" to get there...
  - A lowering of our standards and morals...
- This is a bad choice to a tough problem

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- Choosing the **easier path** often brings with it many **complications**
- There often seems to be problems that spring up in your life when you try to find your own solution to your problems
  - Following God's path is often a more difficult walk... But, much less problems arise
- Almost immediately in Abraham's life things started to get worse... a tell-tale sign!
- He realizes that he has put his life in even more eminent danger due to Sarah's beauty
- Again, he should have been faithful, but you've got to realize that he's already heading down a wrong way road, and it's hard to follow all of the traffic laws when you're already travelling the wrong way on a one-way street
- Once concessions are made to our own worldly self-interests
  - Further demands are almost sure to come
  - Making further concessions inevitable

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- It is really hard to sort out problems when you are in the middle of them
- Envision situations before they arise, in your marriage, ecclesia, work and community
- Trust your Faith in God's ability to save you, and don't put yourself in harm's way
- Abraham shifts the danger over to Sarah...

- In panic and trouble we just don't make good decisions
- How Abraham's conscience must have racked him every time Pharaoh gave him a gift
- God protected Sarah and Abraham... and plagued Pharaoh
- Pharaoh figures it out
- Abraham goes up out of Egypt
- Saved from a terrible situation... Abraham starts fresh again
- Faith is like a muscle...
  - Stretched... Broken down... Built back stronger
  - We don't want to do this... but, God does do it to us...
  - We must learn to take advantage of it!
- Lest you think he learns from this situation...
  - Several years later he does the same thing again
    - He ***"goes down to Egypt"*** again...

#### • SLIDE

- Like all of us... Abraham had moments where his **faith** was **weak**

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- Abraham had problems learning a lesson, and he confronted the **same mistake more than once**
- But, he had dedicated his life to serving his God...
  - He knew that God would justify him...
  - Regardless of his imperfections...

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- Abraham **believed in a God of Mercy**
- From Abraham we see quite clearly that "Walking with God" doesn't mean that once we are baptized we will never sin again...

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- The point is that we now live for a higher purpose
  - Unlike the millions around us who live for nothing else than the petty, rudimentary, base elements of this world...
  - We have a reason, a meaning, a purpose to our existence!

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- We serve the Living God who has saved us by His grace!
- We will continue to fall after Baptism...

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- But, the things we do in weakness **do not define us**
- The sins in our lives are not our goal
  - They are simply impediments on the way to our goal
- Works will not save us
  - But, Faith without works is dead...
- Our sins are not the end of hope for us
  - But, we have to have Faith that God will extend His mercy to us and forgive us
- We have to believe that we can be forgiven
  - No matter what we have done
- IF we repent, and turn from our evil, God is ready to reach out to us
  - And if we want to change, we need to reach out to God

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- Rules are important in a orderly society, but, **Rules will never save us**
- Rules & Regulations have no value in changing our evil desires
- What does?

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- Change comes from the **INSIDE OUT**
- Let's talk about what I mean when I say changing from the **INSIDE OUT**
- It's a concept we all understand, when it comes to our lifestyles and our conversions
- There are three essential types of longings that each person feels deep in their heart

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- The first and most important are **CRUCIAL** Longings
- The desires that must be met if life is to be worth living
- We were designed by God to live in a relationship with Him, and if we do not have that relationship in our life, then our life is profoundly empty

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- Nothing else besides a **DIVINE RELATIONSHIP** can fill that hollow core
- Nothing can satisfy our Crucial Longings except the kind of relationship that God offers
- Every human being will feel empty and hollow inside unless they have reached out to connect with their Heavenly Father

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- The next set of important longings in our life are what we call **CRITICAL** Longings
- There are other important desires that we have in our lives that are not as important as our deep longings for a relationship with God, but they are critical nonetheless

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- Meaningful **HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS** are critical to our happiness
- The desire to be loved and respected by your mate is at the top of most lists
- The desire to see your children remain close to you and live happy, productive lives
- Critical Longings are the legitimate and important desires for quality relationships that add immeasurably to the enjoyment of living
- God did not design us, or intend us to be alone
- It is not good for man to be alone

- God understood that we need to connect with people in this life to truly appreciate and fathom the importance of life
- Victor Hugo said, “To love another person is to see the face of God”

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- The third category that fills our life is what we will call **CASUAL** Longings

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- All of the other **MATERIAL** relationships in our lives fall into this category
  - The **things** that we spend so much time with...
- If a longing or desire in our life does not centrally involve what can be supplied only through another person's giving of themselves, then we'll refer to it as casual
- It might be important, or it might be trivial, but it is something that you fundamentally have to provide for yourself, because it is something that doesn't isn't satisfied from a relationship with another person or from a relationship with God
- When Casual Longings are not satisfied we experience discomfort
- When Critical Longings are not satisfied we experience something entirely different
- When we feel that no one really cares about us, we experience true pain
- Discomfort can be tolerated, but loneliness and rejection are a kind of deep sorrow that empties the soul of energy
- And a life with a connection to God is a life without hope or purpose
- Understand the principle?
- Three fairly simple concentric circles that define the levels of depth of the human condition
- Now, how do we apply this principle to our lives?
- If you stick with me, I'd like to talk about problem resolution, and how all of this connects (at least in my mind) to Rules & Regulations
- Firstly, there are two fundamentally different ideas about how to approach life represented here in these circles...

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- One holds that you need to address the Longings in your life from the **outside in**

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- First, you develop a stable and healthy lifestyle

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- Second, you work on building long-lasting and valuable relationships

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- Then you can concentrate on your relationship with God
- It sounds odd even saying it that way, but that is a very common view of life
- Consider the advice that young people get from their guidance counselors
- Go to college, get a good job so that you can afford home, find a spouse to build a family with, and then you can become a part of a religious community

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- The other way, of course, is from the **INSIDE OUT**

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- Work on your relationship with **God FIRST**

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- Once you have developed Fellowship with God, then **He** will bring into your life other **people** who share the same type of relationship, and you can enjoy relationships with them

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- After you have focused your life on Worship of your Father, and Fellowship with other believers, God will bless you with the satisfaction of the other **things** that you need in this life also
- We're all familiar with the concept...
- *"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and all of these things shall be added unto you"*
- So, these are simple applications that you can understand
- And, hopefully, you can see that in this model, it is better to build a life from the Inside Out
- I'd like to show you that the same process applies to every part of our life



- When we experience problems in our lives, in the lives of our family members, or in the lives of our Brothers and Sisters in the Ecclesia
- When something in a relationship breaks down, or someone gets hurt
- When people are falling and failing
- When sin is rearing it's ugly head
- What do we do?
- We set up some new Rules & Regulations to try to stop the problem
- Our Ecclesial Guidelines and Member Handbooks grow and grow as we print up more and more paper to try to make sure that these kinds of things never happen again
- Sometimes it even gets silly...
- Rare and odd things happen that are singularly unique, and someone wants to make a rule to address it if it ever happens again
- A meteor has fallen from the sky, landing in our parking lot on Sunday Morning, and blocking our front door, causing us to temporarily use the Side Door
- At the next Business Meeting you are bound to hear, *"I move that from now on half of the Doorkeepers position themselves at the Front Door and the other half at the Side Door in case there is an blockage at the Front Door"*

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- Too many times we try to address our problems from the **OUTSIDE IN**

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- Problems arise and the first thing we tend to address are the **things**
- I'm feeling lonely or depressed, so I go shopping, or I eat, or I watch a movie
- And the way we try to address these problems is with **Rules**

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- The Husband tells the wife that she can't go shopping
- The overeater puts themselves on a strict diet
- The Parent says that there is no more TV allowed in the house

- We continue in this pattern of trying to use **things** to address the problems that life inevitably brings into our lives, and then trying to make **rules** to regulate the usage of the **things**
- Sometimes, and this does not apply to everyone, some people develop past that materialistic stage of our lives, and realize that **things** are never going to make us happy, and they will usually turn to other **people**

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- I'm feeling lonely or depressed so I go visit a friend, or give one a call, or write them an email

#### • SLIDE

- Focusing on **Relationships** is much healthier, and better for you than focusing on **things**
- But, it has a down side also...
- Relationships are imperfect!
- Humans are frail and full of sin
- It's even more depressing to have put your trust in another person, and then have that person betray your trust, hurt your feelings, and let you down
- The person whose strength is based on Relationships, sooner or later gets let down
- No one is perfect, and therefore no friendship or human relationship will ever be perfect
- Some are better than others, but everyone of them has it's weaknesses, because they are based on weak human beings
- Lord willing, that disappointment won't ruin us, but will eventually drive us to God
- These two painful and painfully slow realizations...

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- The realization that there is no happiness in **things**, and setting **Rules** doesn't make our problems go away

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- And the realization that while **people** are nice to have around, **Relationships** are not perfect and even the best will eventually disappoint us

- **SLIDE**

- Eventually these two realizations cause some people to turn to **God**

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- People find that only in **religion** do we truly find the solution to our problems
- But, in reality, that whole process is backwards...

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- When problems arise and we are drawn to address them, we should address them from the **INSIDE OUT**

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- First we need to focus on our relationship with **God**
- Look first at what is going on in your mind with your feelings toward your Father

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- Your **religion** has to involve more than just going to meeting
- Yes, this means more time around His Word, but it's more than that
- I'm not one to say to the person who is virtually crippled by their problems, *"Just read the Bible more, and you'll be okay"*
- Time with the Word is critical to improvement, but I think there are several things that are just as important

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- The first would be **Meditation**
- Not sulking, worrying or focusing on the problem to the point of inactivity
- But, deep and honest reflection on what has brought you to the point you are today
- Some focused thinking on what you've read in God's Word
- Some honest thought about what that Word means to you in your life

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- I would follow this with **Listening to God**

- It's not that God verbally speaks to us like he did with Noah...
- But, find some quiet time to just be still with your thoughts, and open yourself to the possibility that God is trying to get a message through to you, but you've been so busy living that you haven't been able to hear it

#### • SLIDE

- And **prayer** is the most important part
- Once you get honest with yourself you can really begin to be honest with God
- Ask God to change you
- To transform you
- We'll talk more about Prayer in our next class...
- So, after we have spent time focusing on our relationship with God, bringing our problem to Him, and making our religion an active and important part of our lives and not just a ritual...

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- **THEN** we are able to reach out to other **people** for help...
- Turn to people who you know are wise and who you see have successfully battled the issues that you are facing in your life

#### • SLIDE

- Cultivate **relationships** that are healthy and God-centered

#### • SLIDE

- Focus on **Fellowship** with Brothers and Sisters who can help you
- Look around you to find those who you think are successfully fighting the same types of battles you are, and seek their counsel and guidance

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- Connected with this would be **Confession**
- But confession has to be to the right person...
- A righteous person
- We'll talk about Confession in our next class also

- Opening up to someone else is often key to really getting at the root of the problem
- It's often too easy to lie to yourself, and a good friend will see through it

#### • SLIDE

- It's at this point that we can safely turn to other **things**
- Once we have positioned ourselves in a good relationship with God and refocused what our religion really means to us
- Once we have reconnected with our Brothers and Sisters and received the benefit of their relationships that God has planned for us in fellowship
- Then we can begin to fill out our life with the things that we enjoy, and the things that give us pleasure
- Things that God has given us to enjoy, and that bring Him pleasure to see us enjoying them
- It is only then that we can really relax and enjoy some shopping, a meal or a movie

#### • SLIDE

- And it is only then that **Rules & Regulations** have a place in our life
- It's only when we have reigned in our desires through transforming ourselves into Disciples of Christ from the INSIDE OUT that we will control ourselves
- Paradoxically, it's only when we don't really need Rules, that they have any value to us

#### • SLIDE

- **Rules & Regulations** have their place in an orderly society or a healthy Ecclesia
- But, **Rules & Regulations** have no effect in checking the indulgences of the flesh

#### • SLIDE

- Only a change, a Transformation, from the **INSIDE OUT** can truly help us in our battle to keep ourselves unspotted from the world