

Our Life Together - 5

‘Enriching Our Life Together’

1. Introduction

1. Last week we started looking at the application of our previous studies to ‘Our Life Together’. In this week’s message, we’ll look at what can we do to enrich our lives together, and what sort of things we should avoid, which have the potential of disrupting fellowship.
2. There are many places we could turn to in the New Testament for a study on ‘Enriching Our Life Together’.
 - a. Much of the New Testament addresses this subject in one form or another
 - b. But in this study, we will focus mainly on what we find in the epistle of James
3. Addressed to “*the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad*” (James 1:1), it is full of advice for:
 - a. Those Christians who find themselves living in a highly mobile society like our own
 - b. Those Christians whose need for fellowship is often a truly felt need (because other normal channels of association like family, friends, etc., may be lacking)

2. Things To Avoid

Let’s begin by observing **five** things we must avoid, if we desire to succeed in ‘Enriching Our Life Together’.

a) Immorality and evil - James 1:21

1. This includes any sort of immoral behaviour or speech, which many Christians ignore at their peril - Eph 5:3-5 ... **Read Carefully!**
2. The wise man wrote of the devastating effects of immorality - Prov 6:27-35

Nothing will destroy the fellowship we have in Christ like sin in the Body of the Church

b) Favouritism - James 2:1-9

We’ve discussed this negative characteristic in our previous studies:

1. Showing respect of persons through ‘favouritism’, or through its more evil cousin ‘bigotry’ (i.e. ‘prejudice’, ‘intolerance’ and ‘bias’), makes us sinners before God - James 2:9
2. Fellowship in Christ is designed to bring us together, not divide us

c) Misuse of the tongue - James 3:1-12

1. The tongue possesses great power to destroy, if we are not careful - James 3:5-7
2. When we misuse the tongue to curse men, it reveals the shallowness of our praise of God – James 3:9-12

During the last World War, an old Navy saying was “*Loose lips sinks ships*”. ‘Loose lips’ can have the same effect on the peace and fellowship in any church.

d) Selfishness - James 4:1

1. James reveals that the root cause of much conflict is nothing more than selfishness
2. As he wrote earlier, “*For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there.*” - James 3:16

If we desire peace and harmony in our fellowship, we must grow beyond the self-centredness of our ‘old man’:

Eph 4:22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,

e) Speaking evil of one another - James 4:11,12

1. Here we learn that speaking evil of another evil actually “*speaks evil of the law and judges the law*”; do we wish to be guilty of that?
2. We also set ourselves up as judges, when there is really only one Judge and Lawgiver
3. This does not rule out the need to “*judge with righteous judgment*” (John 7:24), nor to “*judge those who are inside*” the family of God (1 Cor 5:9-13)

But too often we can be guilty of judging others according to our own personal standards; speaking evil of others is usually an indication of that, and quickly destroys fellowship

These five things can prevent a church from enjoying the fellowship/life that Christ intends for His church. Let’s be very careful and never to allow them to infect the relationship we have as the family of God.

3. Things To Do

At the same time, let’s take a pro-active approach to building fellowship; what does James counsel us to do?

a) View ‘challenges’ as ‘opportunities’ - James 1:2-4

Without being tested and refined, our characters will never develop and strengthen. They stay as if we were still little children.

1. Possessing a positive outlook about difficulties is good for churches as well as individuals

2. Any church that is growing will generally experience problems in maintaining peace and harmony
3. But just as marriages are made stronger when spouses are willing to work together, so a church can be made stronger through overcoming its difficulties.

b) Pray for wisdom - James 1:5-8

1. Maintaining a growing fellowship in a church requires wisdom
2. Just as we should seek wisdom from God as individuals, so we also need to do this together, as a church.

c) Maintain proper perspectives about our situations - James 1:9-11

1. Fellowship is often disrupted by envy or pride
2. But God gives us reasons to be thankful for whatever situation we find ourselves in
3. If all the members are willing to see themselves as God sees them, there will be no room for pride or envy

d) Be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger - James 1:19,20

1. Poor communication and short tempers will quickly destroy any relationship
2. But if we all apply these ‘**three graces**’, problems can be gracefully handled and overcome:
 - a. Swift to hear
 - b. Slow to speak
 - c. Slow to anger

e) Practice pure and undefiled religion - James 1:22-27

1. This involves each of us:
 - a. Being doers of the Word, and not just hearers
 - b. Letting our actions speak louder than our words
 - c. Attending to the needs of the less fortunate
 - d. Keeping ourselves from being influenced by the world
2. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have fellowship in a church where all are true 'doers' of this kind of religion?

f) Demonstrate wisdom by your conduct - James 3:13,17,18

1. Again, we are letting our actions speak louder than our words
2. Note especially verse 17, wouldn't it be wonderful to be in a church filled with people demonstrating a wisdom that is: “...*first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.*”?

g) Pray for one another - James 5:13-16

1. When we are praying for others, it is hard to be angry at them
2. When we know others are praying for us, it is hard not to love them
3. When we are praying for each other, not only is our fellowship with God strengthened, but our fellowship with one another.

h) Restore those who stray from the path of Christ - James 5:19,20

1. When people stray from the faith, we lose the benefit of their fellowship with us
2. Restoring them back to God not only saves them, but blesses us with their renewed fellowship.

4. Conclusion

1. This quick survey of the epistle of James illustrates many of the good things we can do to be 'Enriching Our Life Together'
2. Indeed, the entire New Testament is filled with encouragements:
 - a. Not only to improve our relationship with God
 - b. But also to improve our fellowship with one another.

Let the Word of God be our guide in creating and maintaining 'Our Life Together'.

How about your relationship with God and His children (i.e. the church)? Is it what it ought to be? Can we help one another to draw nearer to God and His family? - Gal 3:26,27; James 5:16

Scriptures For 'Our Life Together - 5'

- i. **James 1:21** *Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.*

Eph 5:3-5 *But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. 4 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. 5 For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a man is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*

Prov 6:27-35 *Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? 28 Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? 29 So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished. 30 Men do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his hunger when he is starving. 31 Yet if he is caught, he must pay sevenfold, though it costs him all the wealth of his house. 32 But a man who commits adultery lacks judgement; whoever does so destroys himself. 33 Blows and disgrace are his lot, and his shame will never be wiped away; 34 for jealousy arouses a husband's*

fury, and he will show no mercy when he takes revenge. 35 He will not accept any compensation; he will refuse the bribe, however great it is.

- ii. **James 2:1-9** *My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don' t show favouritism. 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here' s a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? 6 But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? 8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbour as yourself," you are doing right. 9 But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.*
- iii. **James 3:1-12** *Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. 2 We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. 3 When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. 4 Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. 5 Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. 7 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, 8 but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God' s likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. 11 Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? 12 My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.*
- iv. **James 4:1** *What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don' t they come from your desires that battle within you?*

James 3:16 *For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.*

- v. **James 4:11,12** *Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgement on it. 12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you--who are you to judge your neighbour?*

John 7:24 *Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgement."*

1 Cor 5:9-13 *I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people-- 10 not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy*

and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. 11 But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. 12 What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? 13 God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

- vi. **James 1:2-4** *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 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.*
- vii. **James 1:5-8** *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. 6 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.*
- viii. **James 1:9-11** *The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. 10 But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. 11 For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.*
- ix. **James 1:19,20** *My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.*
- x. **James 1:22-27** *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it-- he will be blessed in what he does. 26 If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. 27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*
- xi. **James 3:13,17,18** *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.*
- xii. **James 5:13-16** *Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. 14 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*

- xiii. **James 5:19,20** *My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.*
- xiv. **Gal 3:26,27** *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*

James 5:16 *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*