

James, the Brother of Jesus (part 2)

John 7:1-9

By Phillip G. Kayser

Intro:

Last week we used Acts 15 as a launch pad to investigate the life of James, the brother of Jesus, more thoroughly. We saw how he rose from very humble beginnings to be the most influential of the three leaders in the Jerusalem church. We have a lot of evidence that even unbelievers highly respected James. So he had enormous influence inside and outside the church. He was an incredibly godly man and an incredibly powerful man of prayer. And so the first point we will look at today comes as kind of shocker.

I. James was a remarkable man

II. His humble beginnings

III. His earlier unbelief (Mark 3:21; John 7:3-5; Psalm 69:8)

A. Did not believe He was the Messiah (John 7:3-5)

James did not believe in Jesus until after the resurrection. The passage we just read in John 7 has been puzzling to many people. In verses 3-4 we see the bad attitudes of the brothers toward Jesus. One commentary describes it as being a “sneer,” a form of mocking or making fun. “If you do these things,” implies that they doubted that He did. In verse 5 it says clearly, **For even His brothers did not believe in Him.** Did His sisters believe? Perhaps. But James, Joses, Simon and Judas did not. So we have mockery and unbelief. But there’s more. In verse 7 Jesus says, **The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that it’s works are evil.** Those three statements taken together mean that His brothers were not regenerate. Though they were outwardly in the covenant, they were not yet part of the invisible church.

1. Application – Auburn Avenue theology does not adequately account for visible/invisible church, covenant, regeneration, election. [See more applications later.]

I know that many Auburn Avenue folks (which is another name for Federal Vision folks) don’t like that traditional visible/invisible church distinction, but you find it throughout the Scripture. Paul speaks of the Israel according to the flesh (1 Cor. 10:18) and the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16). In Luke 3 John speaks of the difference between those who are outwardly

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children of Abraham and those who are spiritually children of Abraham, and uses the figure of the chaff and the kernel. Chaff looks like grain, but it has no life. Psalm 1 uses the same symbol. There's the outward and the inward. Paul says, **For they are not all Israel who are of Israel** (Rom. 9:6). He says, **He is not a Jew who is one outwardly**. So he speaks of outward covenantal appearance and inward reality. And there are many statements like that. 1 John 2:19 is one that you ought to write down. In 1 John 2:19 it says about apostates: **They went out from us, but they were not of us** [So there was some way that they were connected to the church "out from us", but there was also another way in which they were part of the church "not of us"]; **for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us**. None of them. That is quite contrary to Auburn Theology. In fact, it strikes at the very root of the Auburn theology of the covenant.

And I think James and his brothers illustrate this so well. Jesus' brothers are not apostates yet. They are probably perfectly orthodox in theology, they are in the church visible, yet according to the Apostle John they lack saving faith, and in some sense are to be identified with the world. Contrast that phrase in verse 7 - "The world cannot hate you," with what Jesus said about true believers. In John 15:19 Jesus said, **If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you**. That contrast shows that Jesus brothers were really of the world even though they professed to be in the church. Those of you who are studying Auburn Avenue theology, you really need to pay attention to this whole section of the sermon because it flies in the face of what they say. Doug Wilson, Steve Schlissel, Steve Wilkins and the others are friends and brothers in Christ, and yet I believe that their theology has some serious deviations from traditional Reformed theology. I've waited a long time before I have said anything about this subject, but it does concern me.

So when John 7 says, **For even His brothers did not believe in Him**, and Jesus says, **"The world cannot hate you,"** it means that they were not regenerate. Oh sure, they went through the motions of religion. In John 2 they even traveled for a while with Jesus. But God had not yet placed them into His invisible church. Auburn Avenue people react against the older Reformed desires to draw our children to profession of faith and they call it revivalism. And I can understand their frustration with certain excesses. *But water baptism is not enough*.

John Barach, one of the Auburn Avenue theologians, said,

“Every baptized person is in covenant with God and is in union with Christ and with the triune God. The Bible doesn’t know a distinction between being internally in the covenant – really in the covenant – and being only externally in the covenant, just being in the sphere of the covenant. The Bible speaks of the reality, efficacy, of baptism. Every baptized person is in Christ and therefore shares in His new life...”¹

How much of Christ’s life are they willing to say that baptism ushers us into? For many of them, it appears to be everything. The Auburn Avenue session issued a joint statement saying, “By baptism one is joined to Christ’s body, united to him covenantally, and given all the blessings and benefits of his work...” They affirm that faith is given in baptism. Most affirm that justification is given in baptism,² though some (like Wilson) distinguish between corporate justification and individual justification. But even Doug Wilson (the most careful of these scholars) is confusing on this issue. In a recent CD set that I listened to, Doug Wilson said that all baptized Roman Catholics are in Christ, in the New Covenant and are partakers of Christ’s grace. He doesn’t deny that many will be eternally lost. But he insists that the fact that they are broken off does not deny the reality of the saving grace they experienced earlier. Rich Lusk says, “We are not to try to convert our baptized children, as though their spiritual experience had to fit the revivalistic paradigm. Rather, we teach them to persevere in the faith and grace that they already received in baptism.”³

Well then, how do they explain the fact that many later apostatize? They say that they didn’t persevere in God’s grace. But they still insist that those apostates had been once truly in covenant with God, truly in the one and only church, truly members of the body. But the passage we just quoted contradicts that. It says, **They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.** In other words, if they don’t persevere, they weren’t saved in the first place. That’s the historic position. That in a nutshell is the doctrine of the visible/invisible church. John is saying that if they apostatize, they were never saved in the first place, and were not truly in the church of Jesus

¹ John Barach, “Covenant and History,” tape 3.

² For example, Lusk speaks of “baptism’s instrumentality in justification.” He affirms that “baptism is the instrument through which Christ is applied to us unto justification... Baptism is not a good work we do to earn justification; it is a gift of grace through which God grants justification to faith.” *Faith, Baptism, and Justification* (2003)

³ Rich Lusk, “Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy,” (p. 103).

Christ – *they weren't one of us*. And I think James illustrates the historic position. It was while James was in the church outwardly that John says he was really identified with the world.

Auburn Avenue people insist that Titus 3:5 teaches otherwise. Wilkins says,

Take Titus 3:5. It says God saves us according to his mercy by means of the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Ghost. The word washing plainly refers to baptism. Paul says that his washing is something that results in regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

But that is precisely the opposite of what the text says. If Wilkins is correct, and if baptism results in regeneration (however you interpret that regeneration – and many of them deny the historic interpretation), then the text would read “the regeneration of washing.” But as Gordon Clark points out, “The actual phrase “the washing of regeneration” indicates that regeneration washes, not that washing regenerates.”⁴ Those are two quite different things. In fact, they are opposite things.

Now this may seem rather esoteric to you, but there are many Reformed people who are buying this theology. Our denomination has (on a vote of over 90%) said that certain features of the Auburn Avenue Theology are non-Confessional and dangerous. We pastors are being urged to teach on this. Now the Auburn (or the Federal Vision) people are good guys and they have contributed a lot to the church's theology. So we shouldn't throw out the baby with the bathwater. They themselves say that they are just discussing these things and that their views are not set in concrete. But I would encourage you to be very cautious about what you believe in their books. Some of them have changed their views more than once, but have left their readers holding to the old views that they now discard. So be cautious. Some of it is indeed dangerous.

On the baptism question, it is important to distinguish clearly between water baptism (which is a sign) and Spirit baptism (which is the thing that the sign points towards). James was baptized. Steve Wilkins denies that a person may be baptized by water without also being baptized automatically by the Spirit and regenerated. (Of course, they often redefine what regeneration or being “born again” means.) Many Jews had been water baptized, but Jesus said to one of those Jews (Nicodemus) **you must be born again** (John 3:7). Two verses earlier he said, **unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.** (John 3:5).

⁴ Gordon H. Clark, *The Pastoral Epistles*. (The Trinity Foundation, 1984), p. 166.

Those are two different baptisms. Being born of water was a current Jewish expression for Jewish baptism. Everyone who was baptized was born of water. Nicodemus had been born of water. Jesus said that water baptism is not enough. **You must be born again.** You must be born of the Spirit. And He said that to Nicodemus, a man who was in the covenant. If water baptism automatically gave regeneration, that phrase would not make any sense. Their immediate objection is that Pentecost hadn't happened yet. My question back is, "Why did Jesus tell Nicodemus privately that *he* must be born of the Spirit?" We will look at this subject a bit more in a bit, but for now, I think it is quite clear that parents and pastors can't communicate the Spirit to their children. They can pray, and lay claim to God's promises, but only God can regenerate our children and open their eyes.

2. Application – Parenting skills alone are not enough to raise our children in the faith – we must cry out in dependence upon God.

But let's just change the subject and apply this lack of belief to the parenting of Joseph and Mary. I'm sure Mary was very distressed over the things that her sons were doing. And many people have puzzled over this passage in that regard. They immediately assume that there must have been something wrong with the parenting that Joseph and Mary gave to these four sons. Jesus turned out OK, but you would expect that, right? But to have four of your seven children not believing? That gets your attention. And when we start looking at the other bad attitudes of the children, the tension gets even higher. But before you jump to the conclusion that it is the fault of the parents, let me make a couple of observations: from Luke 2:51-52 you would guess that Joseph and Mary did a knock-down-splendid job of raising Jesus, and Jesus submitted to their authority and thrived under their authority. It is clear that they didn't just teach *Jesus* the Scriptures, reading, writing and arithmetic. When you read the two letters of Jesus brothers James and Jude, it is clear that they too were well-trained. So what is going on with this unbelief?

Well, first, I think it is a caution to us to not assume that because our children are baptized, they are automatically regenerate. I agree that Baptism ushers our children into incredible kingdom privileges, one of which 1 Corinthians 7 says is the working of God's Spirit to lead them to salvation. That is incredible. But salvation is not automatic. Paul tells the believer not to divorce their unbelieving spouse because that spouse is sanctified or set apart for the Spirit's working. And Paul says, **how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband,**

whether you will save your wife? The sanctification does not automatically save the unbelieving spouse. Right? We have a part to play in leading them to Christ. But here is the point: since the child is sanctified just as the unbelieving spouse is, the implication is, “How do you know O parent, whether you will save your child?” The passage already indicates that the child is baptized. He’s cleansed. But the context indicates that we still have a part in leading those children to faith. Leading children to faith is not revivalism. It is Plain-Jane Christianity.

Secondly, it is a caution for us to not assume that because we have skillfully used xyz Biblical parenting methods that our children will automatically turn out well. We are dependent upon God and must cry out to God for our children. The President of my Bible School in Canada was actually quite a good parent, raising several children. But his last boy had a mind of his own, and only in later life came back to Christ. That son was much like James. L.E. Maxwell used to say that he might have been proud of his parenting skills and arrogant with others who were struggling if God had not brought along that last child. He came to realize that we may do everything that we are supposed to do as parents – and they *were* model parents – but unless God changes the heart, we will have only succeeded outwardly. And outward success is better than no success. People put down outward conformity and outward success, but that is important. It saves our children from a lot of pain and misery. But the title of the book many of you read should be our goal – *Shepherding A Child’s Heart*. None of us should be proud parents, thinking: “if you only did it our way, your children would turn out OK.” No. Methodology alone is not sufficient. Parenting is designed by God to cast us upon His mercy and to trust in His grace alone. What parent has not pulled his or her hair out at times, wondering, “Lord, what do I do?! What do I do?! How do I get these children to see?” That’s why we constantly place the mirror of God’s Word before their faces – so that they can see themselves as they really are, and then place God’s grace before their hearts. This is why we parent on our knees in prayer. I’ll make more applications in a moment, but let’s move to Psalm 69:8.

B. Was estranged from Jesus (Psalm 69:8)

Go ahead and turn to Psalm 69. This Psalm is a marvelous Messianic Psalm, giving us many details about Christ’s life including the fact that He bore our sins as if they were His own. It is quoted numerous times in the New Testament as being the words of Jesus. And in verse 8 it says, **I have become a stranger to my brothers, and an alien to my mother’s children.** That’s another passage that shows that Jesus’ brothers were born

to Mary (“my mother’s children”). But notice that he had become a stranger to His brothers and an alien to them. In other words, there was an estrangement that had gone on between James and Jesus. We aren’t told what caused it. It may be that he and his brothers were frustrated that they always got spanked and Jesus never did. He was “Mr. Goody Two-Shoes.” When Mom came into the room and there was a conflict, she always assumed that it was James or Joses who were at fault. We can speculate, but we really don’t know for sure why there was frustration and estrangement. Jesus was just different. They had a hard time relating to a guy who was perfect.

It may be that they had picked up some of the reproach that the town had against Jesus. Verse 9 continues: **Because zeal for your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me, when I wept and chastened my soul with fasting, that became my reproach.** [So Jesus got in trouble even for His spiritual disciplines. I can just imagine his brothers thinking, “Why is Jesus fasting again? What does Jesus think He’s trying to prove? That He is more holy than everybody else?” One commentator said, “This psalm tells us about the silent years of Christ’s childhood and young manhood... We hear the heart sob of a small boy, a teenager, a young man.”⁵ Verse 11] **I also made sackcloth my garment; I became a byword to them. Those who sit in the gate speak against me, and I am the song of drunkards.** We know from the Gospels that many Jews spread the slander that Jesus was illegitimate.

So I want to ask, “Why?” Why did Jesus have to bear a life-time of this? First, so that He could be our substitute, in both His active and passive obedience.

Second, so that He could sympathize with us and identify with us in every stage of our lives. Children: Jesus had a difficult brother just like some of you do. He can relate to your frustrations. But he didn’t give up, and you shouldn’t give up. You can trust His grace to overcome evil with good.

Third, Jesus had to go through all of this so that He could experience every trial we face from babyhood and on, yet be without sin. I am not saying that Christ’s unbelieving brothers is the norm. I don’t think it is the norm. I think the norm is for our children to never know a time when they didn’t know, love and serve God. But Jesus experienced unbelieving brothers so that any child who feels hurt by his or her siblings has an understanding Savior who says, “Cast your cares on Me knowing that I care for you.”

⁵ Chuck Missler, Koinonia House, Unpublished.

And if you are the James who has been giving your siblings a hard time, you can praise God that God's grace is sufficient for you. If God's grace could transform James and turn him into the incredibly godly man that we looked at last week, he can do the same for you. In fact, next week, Lord willing, we will see evidence that James' strong will was aligned by grace to God's standard to make him an incredibly strong leader and an incredibly bold martyr. Sometimes these James-es make the best martyrs, and their siblings are cheering them on as they head as missionaries to the headhunters. "Go James, Go."

C. Thought He was insane (Mark 3:21-35)

Turn to Mark 3. This is one more passage that highlights a rather embarrassing point in James's life (if it does indeed apply to the immediate family – and there are some who question that). Given their unbelief, it is natural that they would interpret what Jesus was doing as crazy. As C.S. Lewis points out, if Jesus was not the Messiah, then He was either a crook or He was crazy. These brothers know He is not a crook, and they don't think He is the Messiah, so craziness is the only logical conclusion. They might even think that they were doing Jesus a favor and keeping him out of trouble.

Look at verse 21. **But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, "He is out of His mind."** The word "people" is not in the Greek. It is literally, "when those who were beside Him heard about this." It's an expression of those who are closest to you – usually, your immediate family, though it can be a reference to close friends. One translation renders it, "they that belonged unto Him" (Bishop). But William Lane points out that both from the usage of the expression, and the context of the brothers being present in verse 31, this should be translated as "his own family," rather than simply "friends" or more distant relatives. So eight of the translations that I own translate this as "his family." Two more translate it as "his relatives." Other translations are: "his kinfolk" (Geneva) and "his relations" (NJB). So there are twelve translations that I own that see this as being the family of Jesus. William Lane, in his commentary says, Mary's "faith was insufficient to resist the determination of her sons to restrain Jesus and bring him home" (p. 139). So if this was indeed a reference to His immediate family (and I am convinced that it is), then James, Joses, Simon and Judas His brothers thought that Jesus had gone over the top in this chapter – that He was crazy. Their unbelief naturally led to that conclusion. What an embarrassing part of James' life! He probably looked back on this event in later life and shuddered. It's no wonder that

Jesus entrusts His mother to his best friend John in John 19, rather than to His brothers. Let's make some applications from these three points that we have looked at.

D. Application: The mere possession of covenant privileges does not save a person. We must be born both of water and of Spirit (John 3:5). We must test ourselves to see if we are really in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5). Though God claims our children while in the womb (Is. 44:1-2), and baptizes them with water (v. 3a), we must also pray for Spirit baptism (v. 3b) and eventual public profession of faith (vv. 4-5). Being in Christ covenantally is not enough. We must have His life so that we bear fruit. Every branch that abides in Christ bears fruit (John 15).

First, the mere possession of covenant privileges does not save a person. James had incredible privileges. He was circumcised and baptized on the eighth day. He was brought up in a loving home. He constantly heard the Word of God being taught. He spent a life-time with the God-Man Jesus. And yet the outward is still different than the inward. Some circles put far too much trust in an outward covenant relationship with Jesus (what they call the objective covenant). In fact, I was recently reading Auburn Avenue literature which called the traditional view of regeneration a form of Gnosticism. That is an irresponsible accusation. Thankfully Doug Wilson disagreed with that categorization, but he has problems of his own on this subject. These guys are so reactionary against the extremes of revivalism (and there are extremes that they are legitimately afraid of) that they label too much as being revivalistic and Gnostic. They rail against our desires to see our children making a profession of faith. Their goal is to never deny that faith has already been given (they think) in baptism, and to help their children to persevere in the obedience of faith. Wilkins says, "Paul said you all are baptized into Christ and members of Christ's body, each of you – no qualifications. He doesn't say, if you sincerely repent of your sins and sincerely believe in Christ, then you're a member of the body." But that is exactly what Paul says. In 2 Corinthians 13:5 (talking to the same church that Wilkins references) he says, **Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.** He's talking to church members. That is not Gnosticism. That is not revivalism. It is a legitimate concern for their internal and eternal salvation. You don't assume anything.

Let me tell you something. I want my children to believe, and I don't believe that water baptism saves them as the Auburn Avenue people believe.

Spirit baptism saves them, not water baptism. And there are many examples in the Bible where the two are separated by a long period of time. Water baptism is the promise the parents can lay claim to for Spirit Baptism. Is water baptism a privilege? Yes it is. It's a wonderful privilege. It draws our children outwardly into the covenant, into the ministry of the Word, into effective nurture and training. Water baptism is a promise of the Father that I take seriously. It is a promise that God will be a God to me *and to my children*. But for that promise to find fulfillment, God expects us to lead our children to make profession of faith. Isaiah 44:1-5 is a beautiful picture of God's covenant relationship to our children. It begins in the womb, goes to water baptism, then goes to Spirit baptism, and the children professing faith. It uses Old Covenant language for that profession, but it is beautiful. It says, **They will spring up among the grass like willows by the watercourses. One will say, "I am the LORD's;" another will call himself by the name of Jacob; another will write with his hand, "The LORD's" and name himself by the name of Israel.** They were signing a covenant profession. They were raising their hands publicly and saying, "I am the Lord's. I am a Jacob-ite. I am a son of Abraham. I am a Christian."

People often say that the covenant given to Abraham was unconditional. I will be a God to you and to your children after you. Period. But listen to Abraham's responsibilities in Genesis 18:17-19. **And the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have known him [there's God's grace] in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what HE has spoken to him.** For the covenant to be fulfilled in his children, there were things that Abraham had to do with his kids. God gives the grace to Abraham to be able to fulfill those conditions, but the fulfillment in the children's lives was not automatic.

One objection that the Auburn people bring up is that John 15:2 says that branches that later apostatize are truly in Christ and have His grace or His sap flowing through them. Otherwise they wouldn't be branches. Frankly, this is their strongest verse to teach their view of the covenant, even though the passage says nothing about baptism or sap or inward union. John 15:2 says, **Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.** They say, the branch is really in Jesus. Jesus said so. "Every branch in Me." And yet (they point out) that branch ends up in hell. And so they say,

“There was a genuine union with Christ and His grace simply by virtue of being grafted into Jesus by baptism.” And my response is that there is more than one way that we can be in Christ. I agree that they are in Christ, but *how* are they in Christ? Ephesians chapter 1 speaks of seven ways we are in Christ. And altogether there are eight ways. Teleologically we were in Christ long before the world existed; long before we existed. So that real union is a different union than an experienced union. Ephesians 1 also talks about a representational union that we had with our substitute on the cross – also before we existed. There is a positional union we have with Him on His throne, and because of our position with Him there we can pray with real authority. That’s a kind of legal union. Ephesians 1 also speaks of an experiential union that begins at the time of our conversion. And I am quite willing to admit that at baptism we are covenantally united to Christ’s body, the church, and if we are in the body, there is a sense in which we are outwardly in Christ. That’s a covenantal union. That is outward. And that outward union brings huge benefits. It is real. Hebrews 6 and 10 speak about those covenantal benefits that flow from Christ – even miracles. But Hebrews denies that all who had those covenantal benefits had experienced salvation in any sense. For example, Hebrews 6:9 says, **But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you** [Better than what? Better than the illumination, the tasting of the heavenly gift, the miracles and other covenant blessings that the apostates had experienced while they were in the church. So Hebrews says, “But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you”], **yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.** This means that those other things didn’t accompany salvation. They didn’t lose salvation. They didn’t have salvation in the first place.

But because the Auburn Avenue folk absolutely reject the historic interpretation that says there is a difference between an outward covenantal union and an inward spiritual union, they claim that all baptized people are given all the benefits of a Christian, and they simply need to persevere. They don’t need to be called to faith. They need to be called to perseverance. And if they don’t persevere, and are cut off, they claim that such a branch was once justified, but has now become condemned. So you can lose your justification. It was once elect, but is now reprobate. So you can fall from election. It was once sanctified, but is now completely under the dominion and bondage of sin. It was once a son of God but is now a son of the devil. This completely turns every Reformed definition of soteriology upside down. Now I know that they add all kinds of caveats, but I see no exegetical basis for their caveats. They say that they continue to believe the

Confession, but don't show Scripturally how the Confession could be true (given their interpretation that the Bible must be read as an objective covenant). And it misses the point of verses 4-5 that *all* branches that abide in Jesus bear fruit. It is clear in context that abiding in Jesus is a qualitatively different kind of union than the other branches had. It isn't simply the length of time that the branches are in the vine; it is the fruit bearing. It is parallel to Matthew 7 where Jesus says that "every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit," and "every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (vv. 17,19). The vine image is simply another metaphor that shows how fruit bearing is a way of detecting the counterfeit branches. "Therefore, by their fruits you will know them." (Matt. 7:20) So in John 15 there is one way of being in Christ that does not bear fruit, and there is another way of being in Christ that always guarantees fruit bearing. It is the *fruitlessness* that shows the fake from the real. It is a qualitative difference in union, not a difference in time (perseverance). It would not matter how long the non-fruit bearing branches persevered in staying on the vine, they would not have had what it takes (saving grace) to bear fruit. They weren't saved or "one of us" in the first place.

I know I am spending a long time on this, but it is important. In order to maintain this view that baptized children inherit all the privileges of the covenant (including regeneration and justification), they have to also deny the traditional view of regeneration and justification. It's a logical necessity. Now Doug Wilson is trying hard to keep his feet in both worlds, but he too has somewhat distorted both doctrines. But at least he agrees that there is such a thing as internal regeneration, and I am thankful for that. Let me give you some sample Auburn Avenue quotes from others on this subject. James Jordan says, "The Bible does not teach that some people receive incorruptible new hearts, i.e., that some people are as individuals 'regenerated.'"⁶ So he outright rejects this internal incorruptible regeneration. And my response is, what about 1 Peter 1:23? It says, "**having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible.**" I would encourage you to read the two chapters on regeneration by John Owen, in his book on the Holy Spirit. He has many Scriptures which affirm what Jordan denies. Anyway, James Jordan goes on in this paper: "My thesis is that there is no such thing as "regeneration" in the sense in which Reformed theology since Dort has spoken of it. The Bible says nothing about a permanent change in

⁶ James Jordan, "Thoughts on Sovereign Grace and Regeneration: Some Tentative Explorations," *Occasional Paper No. 32* (Niceville, FL: Biblical Horizons, 2003), p. 1

the hearts of those elected to heaven.”⁷ “My position: everyone who is baptized has been given the same thing. No one has been given a permanently changed ‘regenerated heart.’”⁸ Then why does the Bible speak of a heart transplant? Taking out a heart of stone and giving us a new heart? Though not all of them go to quite the same extent as Jordan, all of them try to avoid anything inward and subjective and try to make the whole covenant objective. This is how they avoid “revivalism” – forget the heart; deal with people objectively. That’s their mantra – “objective covenant.” But James, the brother of Jesus, is a classic case of a person who fits our definition of a person objectively in the covenant who needed a subjective conversion. Call it revivalism; call it whatever you want – James still needed it. He doesn’t need to be told to persevere in a grace he already had. James needed to be told to repent and convert. He was still the seed of the serpent, even though he was outwardly in the covenant.

And they say, that doesn’t make any sense. You are either in the covenant or you are not. There is logically no other alternative. Well, the way they define covenant that is true. But the way the Bible uses the term that is not true: look at the covenant of Abraham. God explicitly told Abraham that Ishmael was not in the covenant, and that God would not make the covenant with Ishmael. Yet God made Abraham circumcise Ishmael with the sign of the covenant. There is a twelve year old boy who has the sign of the covenant, and so he is in the covenant in some sense, and yet God makes clear that he is not in the covenant in another sense. The traditional view is not strange. It is being sensitive to the nuances of Scripture. There is some sense in which the covenant is external and some sense in which it is internal. In fact, when interpreting the Abrahamic covenant, Galatians 4 makes clear that even though Ishmael and Isaac historically lived under the Abrahamic covenant, both were representatives of different covenants. Paul says that Ishmael was in the broken Old Covenant while Isaac was a member of the Christ-fulfilled New Covenant. Some of this may be confusing to you, but the bottom line is two brothers in the Abrahamic covenant are outwardly given the sign of the covenant but inwardly are treated differently.

Contrary to what Auburn Avenue Theology says, branches that are finally broken off are just proving themselves to have never been one of us in the first place. The whole context of John 15 makes that clear. Four times Jesus says that those who abide in Him will always bear fruit (verses

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7

⁸ *Ibid.*

5,7,8,16). In fact, so certain is that, that in Matthew 7 Jesus says, “By their fruits you will know them” (Matt 7:20) and the very next verse goes on to show that **“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven. Next verse, Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? Auburn people jump on that and rightly point out that these are real graces that these people in hell had done. I don’t disagree that Judas did miracles. God’s grace flows broader than election. I believe in common grace. I also believe in covenantal grace. He was outwardly in the covenant, and that provides many amazing benefits. But what Auburn people fail to emphasize is Christ’s words to those people in the next verse – **And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”** He doesn’t say, “I once knew you, but now I don’t.” If Auburn Theology was true you would expect that. You would expect Jesus to tell these covenant members, “You once were genuinely united to me and I knew you, but now I don’t know you any more. Depart from me.” But Jesus says the opposite. He said, **I never knew you.** He didn’t say, I once had a real relationship with you, but you blew it.” No. They never were His in the first place. That why Jesus says in John 6, **All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the ones who comes to Me I will by no means cast out (v. 37)** They won’t be broken off. **This is the will of the Father who sent ME, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.** Jesus is not just talking to the Father. He is telling the disciples this covenant theology.**

Only the historic interpretation of the difference between the outward and inward; the visible and invisible church, and an Israel of the flesh versus a spiritual Israel can explain these things. Paul said, **he is not a Jew who is one outwardly.** But Auburn Avenue theology says “he is a genuine Christian who is one outwardly.” That is exactly what their theology is saying. They are monocovenantal, which forces them to be mono-ecclesiastical. But Galatians denies mono-covenantalism when it divides all of the historical covenants into two spiritual covenants, not one. Read Galatians 4. Paul says “for these are the two covenants.” Every historical covenant has members who are part of one of those two covenants. It is confusion on this issue that has led Doug Wilson to accept not only Roman Catholic baptism (which many who differ with him also do), but accepts such baptized Romanists as brothers who are in the New Covenant, not yet cut off from the vine; not yet cut off from the Olive Tree. He admits that they are heretical brothers, but brothers nonetheless. I can’t accept that. The

Westminster Confession of Faith indicates that the Roman Catholic Church has been cut off in church discipline. And how are we to treat those disciplined? Matthew 18 makes it clear: treat them as heathens and publicans. The Westminster Confession says that Rome is now a synagogue of Satan, not a church of Christ. It is antichrist, not the body of Christ. And I think the Confession is right and Doug Wilson is wrong, great a man as he is, and much as I respect him. And though these guys are still within the faith, I fear that their children will not be. If this theology is taken to its logical conclusion, it will not stay evangelical and Reformed. Even now there are some of these people who are joining the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. I think that is a logical move. But it's not a Biblical one.

Of course, we shouldn't go to the opposite extreme and say that there are no benefits to baptism. That's what some people have done. But I think James could look back on his life and say that even though he did not believe, being in a covenant home was a protection, an environment of godly instruction and a blessing that Christ would later use to change him. Paul in Romans 3 had to deal with exactly that logic when he was saying that circumcision didn't automatically save you. And people jumped to the conclusion that if circumcision didn't usher people into all that Auburn Avenue people say baptism does, the Jews concluded: what's the point of circumcision? Here's Paul's response. **What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God. For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not!** Paul was saying that there were many benefits to circumcision. But all of them were outward. Circumcision was designed to put Jews under the preaching of the Word. It was designed to be a promise that parents could lay hold of by faith. It was designed to be a sign that would lead children to make their own profession of faith. When children were ushered into the church by circumcision they had protection, nurture, instruction of God's Word, and other privileges. According to Malachi it even sanctified the children or outwardly set them apart for the Spirit's working. It was parallel to the logic of baptism in 1 Corinthians 7:14 – a passage which indicates that their cleansing was designed to eventually lead them to faith. It is my contention that baptism works just like circumcision did.

I know that I have probably spent more time on this than some of you were hoping – especially if you don't have the foggiest notion what Federal Vision or Auburn Avenue Theology is. But I felt that something needed to

be said – especially since James illustrates the opposite so well. And I can recommend some excellent books that will help you to sort through a ton of other issues that are wrong with that theology. It really does all logically hang together, and if you have a wrong view of covenant, it will affect your view of regeneration, justification, evangelism, baptism, church discipline and so many other things. Don't take the position that because they are such great, godly men, that they can't be mistaken. I hope that they will eventually ditch their theology and recognize that it doesn't work. But there is no sign so far that calls to repentance are fazing them. Enough said.

E. Application: If you have unbelieving relatives, cast your cares on Jesus. He knows and understands and can overcome.

Let me quickly make three other short applications. First, if you have unbelieving relatives, realize that Jesus understands what you are experiencing. You can lift up these relatives to an understanding Savior. The promise God gives in baptism is not empty. He has promised: "I will be a God to you and to your children after you." Continue to lay claim to those promises. Whether God brings those promises to pass in infancy (as is usually the case) or whether God brings those promises to pass in later life (as in the case of James), never doubt God's promise. Praying according to God's will means basing our prayers in the commandments and promises of Scripture. And Scripture is clear that God can overcome their resistance in His perfect timing.

F. Application: Grace is thicker than blood or than covenant relations (Matt 12:46-50)

Another application is that grace is thicker than blood or than covenant relations. In Matthew 12:46-50 we have this story:

Matthew 12:46 While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him.

Matthew 12:47 Then one said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You."

Matthew 12:48 But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?"

Matthew 12:49 And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers!"

Matthew 12:50 For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother."

This passage indicates that a genuine relationship to God is more enduring than a family relationship or even an outwardly-in-the-covenant relationship. God doesn't have grand-children. That passage indicates that a change in life is needed before Christ will really consider you a brother, sister or mother. We call that change in life regeneration, which is the first stage of sanctification. But without such a change, there is only an outward relationship. That's not to disparage the outward covenantal relationship He had with His four brothers. It is simply to say that the inward is more important than the outward.

G. Application: In apologetics, evidence is not enough (Luke 16:31)

The last application from point III that I want to make is that in apologetics, evidence is not enough. Christ's brothers probably had the opportunity to see more evidence that He was who He said He was than anyone else on earth (other than their mother). Yet they did not believe. In Luke 16:31 Jesus said, **If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.** It's grace, not overwhelming evidence, that will open people's minds. The Bible gives plenty of evidence, and we must give plenty of evidence. But our trust should not be in reason, but in grace. We can't reason people into the kingdom; they are born again into the kingdom.

IV. His Conversion (1 Cor. 15:7; Acts 1:14)

A. Application: We can find hope for our loved ones who just don't get it.

Let's move on to the conversion of James. And we won't spend much time on this. We only have one hint as to how it happened. We know in John 7 that James didn't believe. We know in John 19:25-27 Jesus doesn't give the protection of his mother to His brothers. He gives His mother to His apostle John. In that culture, that would have been insulting. It is clear that they are not yet converted. But, 43 days later in Acts 1:14 we see all the brothers of Jesus were believers at that point. And 1 Corinthians 15:7 gives us the hint as to how it happened. Let me begin reading at verse 3.

1Corinthians 15:3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

1Corinthians 15:4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,

1Corinthians 15:5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.

1Corinthians 15:6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.

1Corinthians 15:7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.

1Corinthians 15:8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

1Corinthians 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

1Corinthians 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am...

Two things to notice: First, the “also” in verse 8 implies that Jesus appeared to James in the same way he appeared to Paul. F.F. Bruce says that this appearance “evidently produced in James a revolutionary effect comparable to that which a similar experience later produced in Paul himself.”⁹ Seeing Jesus with his own eyes and talking with Him turned James’ world upside down. It made him a new man. It appears to have been a sudden conversion where suddenly, everything made sense.

Second, we have a little bit of a chronology here. Based on the appearances that Paul mentions and the ones mentioned in the Gospels, it is likely that James conversion occurred within a 19 day period before Acts 1:14. In your outline is a proposed chronology. James is the only brother visited, so the assumption is that James led his other brothers to believe in Jesus. Acts 1:14 says that **These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.** There is no indication that any brothers were left out.

So this last passage indicates that no one from Jesus’ family was lost. Only the brothers were said to be unbelievers in John 7, and here the brothers are present. Later we know that both James and Jude write Scriptures. And so God’s promise to be a God to us and to our children after us was indeed fulfilled. We might prefer that the conversions happen younger (and that is ordinarily the case), but we can continue to trust God for our loved ones even when they are older and have their own families.

⁹ F.F. Bruce, “James and the Church of Jerusalem,” in Bruce, *Men and Movements in the Primitive Church* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1979), p. 87.

B. Application: it is grace, not connections, which gets us into heaven. It is grace, not the covenant, which gets us into heaven. (1 Cor. 7:14-16)

I will end part 2 of this sermon series on James with this last application. It is grace, not connections which gets us into heaven. You couldn't have gotten better connected than James did. Yet John 7 indicates that James was a church member on the path to destruction. It is grace, not the covenant, which gets us into heaven. The covenant is the context within which grace works, so the covenant is important. But it is not enough. 1 Corinthians 7 illustrates that. It indicates the moment one parent in a family comes to Christ, the covenant lays hold of that family, sanctifies the whole family outwardly, and God's Spirit begins to work in the family. But verse 16 makes it clear that it is grace, not the covenant which saves. If you are a covenant child who, like James, has never put your faith in Jesus, I would urge you to lay hold of Him, to cry out to Him for the salvation pictured in the covenant, to repent of your trust in outward blessings and to put your trust in His finished work alone. And then, having trusted Jesus for salvation, to begin a walk of faith that daily appropriates all that you need for life and godliness from the riches that can only be found in Him (Ephesians 1:3). Let's pray.

Charge: Do not be satisfied with the outward appearance of the covenant. 2 Timothy 3:5 speaks of **having a form of godliness but denying its power**. In Matthew 23 Jesus speaks of having the outside of the cup perfect, but the inside is full of filthiness. Revelation 3 speaks of true Jews and false Jews. Paul speaks of "false brothers." Paul contrasts the Israel of the flesh with the Israel of God. God wants your hearts. So, children of God, I charge you not to look just to the outward, but to look to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of your faith. Amen.