

James Chapter 5

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The Book of James, Chapter 5

- Do not worship money.
- Be patient.
- Stand firm.
- Don't grumble.
- Do not swear.
- Pray.
- Confess your sins.

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James had made reference to the wealthy in the nation earlier.

But you dishonor the poor! Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear? James 2:6-7

Social justice is embedded in God's Word. **William Barclay** summarizes:

Not even the most cursory reader of the Bible can fail to be impressed with the social passion which blazes through its pages. No book condemns dishonest and selfish wealth with such searing passion as it does. The book of the prophet Amos was called by J. E. McFadyen "*The Cry for Social Justice*." Amos condemns those who store up violence and robbery in their palaces (Amos 3:10). He condemns those who tread on the poor and themselves have houses of hewn stone and pleasant vineyards—which in the wrath of God they will never enjoy (Amos 5:11). He lets loose his wrath on those who give short

weight and short measure, who buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes, and who palm off on the poor the refuse of their wheat. "I will never forget any of their deeds," says God (Amos 8:4-7). Isaiah warns those who build up great estates by adding house to house and field to field (Isaiah 5:8). The sage insisted that he who trusts in riches shall fall (Proverbs 11:28). Luke quotes Jesus as saying, "Woe to you that are rich!" (Luke 6:24). It is only with difficulty that those who have riches enter into the Kingdom of God (Luke 18:24). Riches are a temptation and a snare; the rich are liable to foolish and hurtful lusts which end in ruin, for the love of money is the root of all evils (1 Timothy 6:9-10).

Now James addresses these wealthy landowners and oppressors of God's people.

(James 5:1) Look here, you rich people: Weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you.

A. Words To The Rich

- While the **rich** are not present and are not apt to see these words, James addresses them for the benefit of the believers who are reading this.

B. Troubles Are Coming

- The justice of God will prevail. There will be great troubles for those who have gained **riches** at the expense of their field workers. This is unfolding before us.

(5:2) Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags.

A. Their Wealth Will Rot

- The wealth that can **rot** is their field crops. They were forcing their field-workers to work and then not paying them properly. The Lord will provide conditions where their crops will **rot** to replace the fine crops that brought them wealth.

B. Their Clothes Will Be Destroyed

- One form of wealth among these people was their **clothing**. This was a form of wealth that others could see and admire. In our society, a ring of precious gems fills that role. Buyers delude themselves that they are making an investment, but it's only an investment in status.

James says their fine **clothing** will become **moth-eaten rags**. Trouble is looming.

(5:3) Your gold and silver have become worthless. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh like fire. This treasure you have accumulated will stand as evidence against you on the day of judgment.

A. Precious Metals Will Be Worthless

- In normal times, investing in gold and silver is common and can be safe, especially in times of political instability.
- Instead of putting their money to work feeding the hungry, clothing the destitute, providing medicines for the sick, and spreading the gospel, the rich were saving their money for a “rainy day.” It benefited no one.

B. The Day of Reckoning

- James sees a **day of judgment**, either in their lifetimes or at the end of time. The evidence for the punishment of the wealthy will be their **treasure**.

(5:4) For listen! Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay. The wages you held back cry out against you. The cries of those who harvest your fields have reached the ears of the LORD of Heaven's Armies.

A. They Have Cheated Their Workers

- The wealthy have refused to pay their laborers. James calls it **cheating**, and it **cries out** against the rich.

B. The Lord Has Heard Their Cries

- The cries of despair have come to the attention of the **Lord of Heaven's Armies**. Just imagine the heartache of a worker on the job long hours so he can support his wife and family and to be told that he would not be paid today.

There was a standing rule from the Law of Moses that said:

You must pay them their wages each day before sunset because they are poor and are counting on it. If you don't, they might cry out to the LORD against you, and it would be counted against you as sin. Deuteronomy 24:15

So the Lord of Armies will take action. Sounds like a war is coming where all of the rules change.

(5:5) You have spent your years on earth in luxury, satisfying your every desire. You have fattened yourselves for the day of slaughter.

A. The Charge Of Luxury

- Luxury included fine meals, high in fat content. The wealthy had gained weight and like animals being prepared for butchering, they were ready for a coming **slaughter** brought from the hand of the Lord of Armies.

B. A Day of Slaughter is Coming

- The day of slaughter could well have been the appearance of the Romans in AD 66. Because the land owners of Judea had not paid their taxes to Rome, they were invaded by the Roman Army.

(5:6) You have condemned and killed innocent people, who do not resist you.

A. The Charge of Murder

- These overweight landowners found a way in court to charge their field workers and have them put to death. Their turn was coming.

Now, back to the believers:

(5:7) Dear brothers and sisters, be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They eagerly look for the valuable harvest to ripen. (8) You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near.

A. Be Patient

- Be **patient** while **waiting** for the **Lord's return**. There are several possibilities about the **Lord's return**. We favor the view that James is referring to the Destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The comment **LORD of Heaven's Armies** in verse four favors this view. The wealthy would be held to account by the **Lord of Armies**. The waiting time would not be long. Consider also Jesus' comment while describing the coming destruction of Jerusalem:

For as the lightning flashes in the east and shines to the west, so it will be when the Son of Man comes.

Matthew 24:27

The fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 was labeled as a coming of Christ.

B. Patience Seen In Nature

- The farmer knows that he cannot plant this week and harvest next week. He has to **wait** until the **fall rains** have come so the seed will germinate. Then he **waits** for the **spring rains** without which the grain would not mature.

C. Take Courage

- The wrongs of earth will be made right soon. The **nearness** of the coming reinforces the view that James has the destruction of the nation in mind.

WHEN SAINTS GRUMBLE

(5:9) Don't grumble about each other, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. For look—the Judge is standing at the door!

A. They Must Not Grumble

- They must not blame one another for the troubles of the situation in which they find themselves for, if they do, they will be breaking the commandment which forbids Christians to **judge** one another.

B. Judgment Will Be Soon

- The **Judge is at the door**, using a phrase which Jesus had used.

In the same way, when you see all these things taking place, you can know that His return is very near, right at the door. (Mark 13:29)

(5:10) For examples of patience in suffering, dear brothers and sisters, look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

A. Old Testament Examples of Patience

- James cites two **examples** and there are many more. He cites Job in verse 15 and Elijah in verse 17.
- Jesus cited **all** of the prophets and their suffering:

Therefore, I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers of religious law. But you will kill some by crucifixion, and you will flog others with whips in your synagogues, chasing them from city to city. As a result, you will be held responsible for the murder of all godly people of all time—from the murder of righteous Abel to the murder of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you killed in the Temple between the sanctuary and the altar. I tell

you the truth, this judgment will fall on this very generation. Matthew 23:34-36

Jesus spoke of the judgment of this generation which is a reference to the coming destruction of Jerusalem.

(5:11) We give great honor to those who endure under suffering. For instance, you know about Job, a man of great endurance. You can see how the Lord was kind to him at the end, for the Lord is full of tenderness and mercy.

A. We Honor Those Who Suffered

- It is always a comfort to feel that others have gone through what we have to go through and he cites the case of **Job**. James reminds his readers that the prophets and the men of God could never have done their work and borne their witness had they not patiently **endured**.

B. The Lord is Kind

- There will be moments in life when we think that God has forgotten, but if we cling to the faith, at the end we, too, shall see that God is very **kind** and very **merciful**.

(5:12) But most of all, my brothers and sisters, never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned.

A. Believers Are Required To Be Truthful

- At first it seems that James has changed the subject, but he is rejecting the temptation to ease the suffering by a false oath.
- Believers must always avoid deceiving others to gain advantage.

WHEN SAINTS SUFFER

(5:13) Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises.

A. Handling Hardships

- **Hardships** could include mental turmoil, work pressure, physical pain and sickness, a loss of money, an enforced move, evil accusations, and persecutions.
- The solution is to turn them over to the Lord. Yes, He already knows about them, but we are still required to verbalize them.

WHEN SAINTS ARE HAPPY

B. Handling Happiness

- **Happiness** is not a license for indulgence, but an occasion that brings forth songs that **praise** the Lord. He hears.

WHEN SAINTS ARE ILL

(5:14) Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord.

A. Handling Sickness

- **Sickness** is a normal part of living and it happens among Christians, too. One solution for these believers was to call the **elders** of the church. The **sick** are to take the lead, not complain because the elders do not seek them out.

B. The Elder Team

- In keeping with church history since it was established in A.D. 30, the elders act as a team because they do not have authority as individuals.
- **Donald Fream** writes:
He calls for the elders of his local congregation with whom he has, and has had, mutual fellowship and spiritual guidance. Prayer is not a strange thing to this sick person and he is not requesting healing from a stranger-God, but from a heavenly Father and a

personal Savior. The sickness is illness of body and not a figurative representation of some spiritual need.

C. The Anointing

- This could be a religious ritual or James may be telling them do what is normally done for sickness, considering the time in which they lived. Pouring oil on the sick was medicine in their timeframe. “Apply the medicine that you have available and ask God to bless its reactions.”

And they cast out many demons and healed many sick people, anointing them with olive oil. Mark 6:13

Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. Luke 10:34

- Donald Fream writes:

If Christians should deliberately refuse to consult a physician or apply medicine, demanding that God do it all and that they will do nothing, this is a form of tempting God.

(5:15) Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven.

A. Prayer Offered In Faith Heals

- Note that it was not the oil that healed, but **prayer**. Praying for the **sick** is appropriate in any timeframe, then or now.
- This sounds like guaranteed healing, but other Scripture makes us think otherwise.
- Case #1:

Erastus stayed at Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick at Miletus. 2 Timothy 4:20

The Apostle Paul did not have a way to heal Trophimus..

- Case #2:

Don't drink only water. You ought to drink a little wine for the sake of your stomach because you are sick so often. 1 Timothy 5:23.

The Apostle Paul did not have a way to heal Timothy.

- Case #3:

Meanwhile, I thought I should send Epaphroditus back to you. . . . And he certainly was ill; in fact, he almost died. But God had mercy on him—and also on me, so that I would not have one sorrow after another. Philippians 2:25 and 27

The Apostle Paul did not have a way to heal Epaphroditus.

So we conclude that healing from sickness is not guaranteed by this James passage and because it was written before any of Paul's writings, Paul would have known this statement of James.

WHEN SAINTS SIN AGAINST ONE ANOTHER

(5:16) Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

A. What Sins Are To Be Confessed?

- **Donald Fream:**

So it would seem quite possible the sin confessed to the brother is the sin committed against the brother. This is the confession that must be made in order to restore harmony. Even as with God forgiveness is conditioned upon repentance, so in the commandments to forgive one another, repentance is implied. A brother who is penitent enough to confess his guilt touches the heart-strings of him who has the responsibility of forgiving. God requires confession and repentance for restitution of the Christian.

- The statement does not say that all sins are to be confessed to a priest as the *Roman Catholic Church* practices. Rather, if we sin against a brother, confess and settle the matter. There will be no healing until we do that. Jesus taught this in His Sermon on the Mount:

So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.

Matthew 5:23-24.

(5:17) Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years! (18) Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops.

A. Elijah Prayed With Results

- James points out that Elijah got miraculous results as he prayed about the weather in his day. His primary readers all knew the story of Elijah.

WHEN A SAINT ERRS FROM THE TRUTH

(5:19) My dear brothers and sisters, if someone among you wanders away from the truth and is brought back, (20) you can be sure that whoever brings the sinner back will save that person from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins.

A. Wandering Is Possible

- While some teach that falling away is not possible, others live that way. It is clear that wandering away from the truth is possible, plus returning to the truth is possible.
- **William Barclay** offers this view that demonstrates falling away:

Truth is something which a man must love
(2 Thessalonians 2:10);

it is something which a man must obey (Galatians 5:7);
it is something which a man must display in life
(2 Corinthians 4:2);
it is something which must be spoken in love
(Ephesians 4:15);
it is something which must be witnessed to
(John 18:37);
it is something which must be manifested in a life of
love (1 John 3:19);
it is something which liberates (John 8:32); and
it is something which is the gift of the Holy Spirit, sent
by Jesus Christ (John 16:13-14).

B. Restoring Is Possible

- Sometimes the one who has wandered sees that he needs to repent and does it on his own. Other times, he may be retrieved because another believer works with him until he is restored. It happens both ways.

C. Restoring Has Rewards

- There is personal joy when our words result in a straying saint returning to his Lord. Someone has been saved from eternal death and they are now back in God's fold of forgiveness.