

Epistle of James

Chapter 5

Slow to wrath: patient endurance is greater than riches (5:1-12)

1. James almost certainly switches from addressing the brethren in 5:1-6 to pronouncing the doom that is to be expected for those who are rich and then oppress their workers, or the poor in general.
 - a. The ungodly rich are called to weep and howl, or literally “burst into tears,” because many miseries will come to them.
 - b. The riches they focus on are doomed to corruption and will not serve them at all in God’s kingdom.
 - c. Their garments are destined to be moth-eaten and are worthless for the garments required for eternal life.
 - d. Even precious metals like their gold and silver, historically afforded great value in civilizations because they endure many destructive forces, will be corroded.
 - e. By placing their faith in their personal treasures, James declares that they can now only look forward to having their flesh consumed in the fire of god’s judgment.
2. James now provides the list of their material wealth-related sins.
 - a. They heaped up treasures for themselves and failed to be generous with others.
 - b. They defrauded those who performed legitimate services and earned wages that were not properly paid to them.
 - c. So egregious were their fraudulent actions that the cries of those harmed by them reach up to heaven and the “Lord of Sabaoth” or the Lord of lords and the Lord of armies.
 - d. They have lived by indulging their lusts for pleasure and luxuries.
 - e. They have fattened their hearts as one might fatten a cow for slaughter.
 - f. They have figuratively or even literally murdered the just (believers) even though the believers did not resist their attackers because they submitted themselves to the Lord instead of fighting back.
3. By contrast, James returns in 5:7-12 to talking about the brethren who need to exercise godly patience in their lives of faith.
 - a. Be patient and wait expectantly for the coming return of the Lord.
 - b. Believers are to wait for the Lord in the same way a farmer, after planting season, patiently and expectantly waits for the precious fruit that will come at harvest time.
 - c. Believers are to wait until we receive both the early and latter rain.
 - i. The early rains allow for the panted seed to germinate.
 - ii. The latter rains provide water for the crop to properly ripen.
 - d. Believers must be patient in all the trials, temptations and struggles of this world (count it all joy (1:2) and properly establish their hearts in the truth.
 - e. The coming of the Lord is at hand. We must believe this and patiently wait for His return.
 - f. While we wait for the Lord to return, we must not grumble and complain against the brethren in the church.

- g. Failure to refrain from grumbling and complaining could result in our condemnation by the Lord.
- h. The Lord Himself is our judge; He is standing at the door of our hearts, and He knows all things. This ought to give us proper pause (slow to speak and slow to wrath) before we take any actions which the righteous judge will condemn us for.
- i. Examples of proper patience without grumbling and sin.
 - i. The prophets spoke the words of the Lord, and most were killed for it.
 - ii. Those who may not have been killed certainly suffered at the hands of those who hated hearing the word of the Lord spoken to them.
 - iii. Now that they have long since died, and we know the impact of their lives, we count them blessed even if we could not endure all that they did in service to God.
 - iv. Job, though not sinless, demonstrated perseverance all the way to the end of the story and then he received all that the Lord, being merciful and compassionate, desired to bless him with and to restore his life.
- j. Above all, believers are instructed not to swear an oath by heaven or earth.
 - i. Taking an oath almost always ends with a broken vow and causes great pain and destruction.
 - ii. Instead of taking an oath, believers should say “yes” and then do what they agreed to or say “no” and let that be the end of the matter.
 - iii. Saying “yes,” but then not doing what was spoken will bring us into judgment. The same with saying no.

Essential instructions for the mature believer (5:13-20)

1. Instruction to the one suffering: pray.
2. Instruction to the cheerful: sing psalms.
3. Instructions to the sick:
 - a. Call for the church elders
 - b. Let the elders anoint the sick person with oil and pray over him in the name of the Lord.
 - c. The prayer of and in faith will save him (not necessarily heal him).
 - d. The Lord will raise the sick person up to eternal life because of his faith.
 - e. If the sick person has committed sins, he will be forgiven by showing he trusts in the Lord.
4. Instructions to the one in trespasses and sins: confess them to one another and pray with one another for forgiveness and healing.
5. God’s promise to the faithful prayer: the effective and fervent prayer will be heard, and God will act.
 - a. Elijah was an ordinary man, but he earnestly prayed that the rain would stop, and it did.
 - b. After a 42 month drought, he prayed again for rain and it did rain and then the earth produced its fruit.
6. Instructions for dealing with apostasy.
 - a. If anyone wanders away from the truth, other believers should seek to turn him back.
 - b. The one who cares enough to turn back an apostate brother, has truly played a part in saving the person’s soul from death (hell).
 - c. Even if a multitude of sins has been committed, apostasy being central, God’s perfect grace can still cover a multitude of sins in response to our faith and trust in Him.