

The Believer and Practical Living

James 5

Overview – Contentment: *James 5:1-11*

Perspective

The chapter opens with a passage on patience. There was not much of a middle class in the Roman Empire. There were the wealthy and the poor, and generally believers were in the latter group. Churches were poor and usually met in homes. James wrote to encourage those that struggled under these conditions. He reminded them that they lived in a wicked world where men love riches more than anything else. Because of this the wealthy often trust in their riches instead of in God (1 Timothy 6:17). They do as they please, believing to be above accountability. Certainly not all that are blessed with riches make these mistakes. There is nothing wrong with wealth as long as it is secured and used correctly. What must be remembered is that wealth is limited and cannot be enjoyed forever. Sadly, the wealthy usually live for the moment never realizing the importance of eternity until it's too late. Instead of weeping because of their sin, they happily continue along their way to destruction. At the end they discover that there is no righteousness to be found in wealth, it is found only in Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

James leveled four charges against the wealthy. First, they hoarded when it was unnecessary. The wealthy gathered a surplus that would eventually rot. Nothing in this world lasts forever (1 John 2:15-17). Instead of using their riches to benefit others they selfishly packed them away until they

*"No sin is involved in the possession of money, and there is no virtue in being poor."
Charles Erdman*

decayed. The irony is that their wealth accumulated for pleasure would testify against them in judgment. Second, they were guilty of fraudulent business. Workers were hired but evidently did not receive their wages, or were cheated out of them. During New Testament times laborers were hired daily and paid at the end, without a contract (Matthew 20:1-16). The law made it clear that workers were to be paid immediately and fully for their work (Deuteronomy 24:14-15; Leviticus 19:13). It is likely the poor were unable to fight this legally, due to finances and the influence of the wealthy. This unfair treatment is still common in our world today. At times it appears the wealthy have the advantage but the Lord is aware of all that transpires. Third, they lived lives of indulgence. The passage implies the wealthy lived luxuriously at the expense of those they defrauded. They became wanton, overindulgent, living only for the treasures of the world. Their hearts were nourished as they pleased their flesh with whatever was desired. Like animals set aside for slaughter they prepared themselves for judgment. The difference, beasts are led to slaughter while the wealthy go voluntarily. Fourth, they condemned and killed the just. Their actions opposed true believers and it is possible they actually slew some that opposed them. The selfish conduct of the rich often leads to the demise and eventual death of many. The wealthy are allowed to continue for a time but will eventually stand before God in judgment

Chapter Outline

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A. Personal Problems: *James 5:12-15*

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(Revelation 20:11-15). James did not attack the wealthy but those that abused what they possessed. There is nothing wrong with riches just the love of those riches (1 Timothy 6:10).

Patience

James encouraged the believers to continue with patience. It is tempting to complain or grumble when afflicted. After a while bitterness may work its way into the heart and soon vengeance will be sought. They were reminded of the farmer's patience concerning the crops. He waits for an extended period of time because he knows the harvest will arrive shortly. The farmer cannot speed up time, so does not even attempt to. He cannot change the seasons, so works and waits for the harvest. The crop does not pop up overnight, but it does come eventually. Like the farmer, the believers were encouraged to be patient. They were not to quit because it was difficult or wilt under the pressure of oppression but they were to remain strong in the Lord, knowing His return was near (Philippians 4:5; 1 Peter 4:7). Jesus Christ will put an end to the trials believers face. For the moment, we are to live for God (Hebrews 10:23-25). We cannot speed up time or change His plan, but we can faithfully wait for the Lord's return.

The Farmer's Patience

He waits but works – pulling the weeds, watering when necessary, and preparing for the harvest.

He waits because it is worth it – the harvest is a blessing.

The believers were discouraged from grumbling. Impatience often makes men irritable. It is likely they became upset due to the conditions, and this may have led to the mistreatment of others – family and fellow believers. Often, we allow our situation to get the better of us and it leads to sin. Instead they were to follow the example of the prophets, men that were in the will of God, yet suffered (Hebrews 11:35-38). We find these men waiting on the Lord, trusting Him in all areas. Job was another man offered to them as an example. He was greatly afflicted yet remained patient. In the end, he was humbled, brought to repentance, and blessed. The Lord never forsook Job (Job 23:10). These examples remind us that we can have confidence in God, knowing He is merciful to those that trust in Him.

Overview – Conduct: *James 5:12-20*

Personal Problems

When facing great difficulties it becomes easy to speak improperly. If we are not careful our emotions can dictate our words. The believers were directed to avoid rash oaths or profane promises. When questioned they were to provide a simple answer – either yes or no. Using God's name in order to make a point or provide affirmation is foolishness. Since we do not govern God, we have no authority to swear by (Matthew 5:34-37). Nobody knows what the Lord plans or how He will work. Be careful with your words, and remember when the Lord's name is spoken in a way we are not authorized, it is taken in vain (Exodus 20:7).

"How can you expect the name of God should be a strong tower to you in your distress if you profane it and play with it at other times?"
Matthew Henry

Instead of swearing, the afflicted are to pray and the merry are to sing psalms unto the Lord. Notice, no matter what the situation we are to look to God, either to seek His assistance or to praise

Him. The sick are to call for the elders to anoint them in the name of the Lord and pray for them. Sickness is real and the Bible makes this clear (Genesis 48:1; 2 Samuel 12:15; Daniel 8:27; Matthew 8:16). When sick we are often distraught, discouraged and at times disoriented. It is good to have someone pray for us. Much has been made of the procedure of the elders. Oil was commonly used with the sick for its medicinal value (Isaiah 1:6; Luke 10:34). It was also symbolic of the Spirit's power. Anointing oil was poured on the heads of prophets, priests, and kings, signifying the Spirit's call and work through them. Remember the elders were to pray in faith, with unwavering confidence in God to provide strength for the sick to be healed. We find the Lord to be consistent, providing power through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9; Hebrews 11). This is not a guarantee that God will always heal the sick; sometimes He chooses to work through the illness instead of removing it (2 Corinthians 12:7). The prayer of faith seeks God's divine help then waits for His decision.

Persistent Prayer

They were encouraged to confess their sins to each other and then pray for the other. This seems to be primarily for the sick. If the sickness was due to discipline for sin, their repentance might open the door for healing. If the sickness was natural, their un-confessed sins should be addressed in order to make things right with God (1 John 1:9). They were to confess to each other, those they offended, not the elders or other officers in the church. Repentance and confession open the door for powerful prayer. Nothing hinders prayer like sin (1 John 3:22). Effective prayers come from the righteous. The quality of the prayer depends upon the life of the individual. Elias, or Elijah, was given as an example of this. He lived in the same world of sin suffering reproach, affliction, and persecution like other believers. Yet, his prayer life was exceedingly effective. Because the land was filled with idolatry, Elijah prayed for no rain (1 Kings 17) His prayer was heard and answered immediately. After three years and six months without rain, he again prayed, but this time for rain (1 Kings 18:42-45). The skies opened up and the rain came down. The prayers of the righteous are powerful because they go up to Almighty God.

As the book comes to a conclusion we are reminded of our responsibility concerning fellow believers. According to this passage, it is possible for a believer to wander into sin. What should be done when this occurs? We could cast them away or the strong could bear the infirmities of the weak (Romans 15:1; Galatians 6:1). Never forget the apostles were often forgiven and allowed to serve again. There are two great effects when a struggling believer is aided. They are converted, which means to turn from one direction to another. Of course a sinner is converted at salvation, turning from darkness to light, but a believer is also converted when sin is forsaken and they are brought back into fellowship with God. They are not saved again, but like David, their joy in salvation is restored (Psalm 51:12). Also a multitude of sins will be hidden. The erring believer will be forgiven and many sins will be prevented.

Questions for Consideration

What is the danger with wealth?

Are you selfish when it comes to money?

Are you becoming more and more patient in the testings of life?

What can be learned from the farmer?

Do you pray when in trouble?

What can be learned from Elijah?

What can be learned from Job?

Is it right to pray for the sick? If so, how?

Why is it necessary to have faith with prayer?

What is your attitude toward the struggling brother or sister in Christ?

Points to Ponder

What is wrong with saving money?

Nothing, but we should be wise stewards of what God has given. It is also correct to support those that depend upon us. There is a difference between using riches and loving them, saving and hoarding. We are not to set our affections on wealth.

Can a believer be wealthy on earth?

Yes, if God allows. The Lord is above all and able to give riches to whom He desires. Believers are allowed to gain wealth but should never fall in love with it. God must be sought first in all things. If He blesses with wealth use it for His glory.

What is the result of impatience?

Impatience leads to troubles. Abraham's led to the birth of Ishmael and problems in the home. The impatience of Moses kept him from going into the Holy Land. Peter's impatience made him aggressive and nearly a murderer. As you can see, it is best to wait on God.

Do believers suffer?

Yes. God's prophets suffered greatly at times. Some were persecuted and others were martyred. Contrary to popular opinion, suffering is often the result of faithfulness not unfaithfulness. If these men suffered, it should not be surprising that we do as well.

Why are the prayers of the righteous heard?

Only a righteous person is able to offer powerful prayer. The prayers of sinners are not heard - there is no faith. The prayers of doubting or hypocritical believers are not heard - there is no faith. The prayers of the righteous are offered with faith.