
Into Thy Word Bible Study in James

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James 5: 19-20: Bring Back Our Wandering Brothers!

General idea: This final passage in James is about having personal concern for others. Jesus shows the ultimate care as He seeks us out to offer salvation that we do not deserve and continues to seek us when we wander from Him! The picture is of the Good Shepherd who loves and cares for His sheep—us (John 10:11-18). He will do all it takes to get us back on the path of His plan and will—which is the best path for us.

It grieves our Lord deeply when we reject Him or turn from Him and His ways. He is especially grieved when we seek the tantalizations the world has to offer and ignore His wonder and blessings. As our Lord showed us by example, we are to follow up by caring for His people—our brothers and sisters in the Lord. This is a call to *rescue*, like a lifeguard rescuing a person who is drowning. People all around us are drowning in a sea of lost hope; we can be the person who hands them the lifeline of hope. We do this by praying and by example with humility, sensitivity, persistence, and by going out of our way for them.

Ministry is not just the proclamation of the Gospel; it is the example of the Gospel lived out in the lives of Believers as they show real compassion for individuals. If we are not doing this, we are not doing ministry. We are to not only care in word, but we are to show that care in deeds; even if we have to confront someone, we are always to do it in love and within the parameters of the Fruit of the Spirit. Thus, when we see someone start to stray, we are to come along side him/her in love and help him/her back to His path. We are to show His love and our genuine concern by being willing and able to help out beyond our comfort zone and cultural considerations. Do not wait; we are called to care and to care *now!*

Vs. 19-20: James has concluded all he has to say about temptations, gossip, wisdom, and riches. Now, he moves to summarize and encourage those people facing persecution to live lives of distinction, regardless of what they feel and face. Meanwhile, a famine was in its apex and the Jewish aristocracy was preventing Christians from receiving their deserved rations and charity. The temptations of the world were starting to appeal to them in light of the frustrations of trials. Thus, the new Christians were starting to turn on one another. Many people felt, as today, that the church rejected them so they turned away in grief, while the other Christians did nothing to bring them back or to show them they were loved or cared about. We have the same problem today; most people leave a church because they do not get connected and they feel no one cares. We are called to care and literally go out and bring them back, not by force, but by showing the real, authentic love and the hospitality of our Lord Jesus Christ!

- *If anyone.* At this time, according to the Jews, if a person wandered from the Law and faith, it was called “apostasy” and they were not counted by God (Ezek. 18:21-25). There was a debate in Jewish sects as to whether such acts were forgivable or unforgivable. There is no debate here for us if we are real in Christ. As Christians, we may still have Christ if our faith is real; but, we may also bring upon ourselves judgment and disfavor with God (Heb. 2:3; 2 Pet. 2:20-22). This is a serious matter and must not be ignored! James may have also been calling back the radical elements that had left to fight the Romans.
- *Wandering from the truth.* This is a person who has professed his/her faith in Christ but at some point renounced or turned from it, or one who is not living a godly lifestyle. Thus, he/she once had Christ as Lord, but now is fallen away from the fellowship of the church, perhaps seeking and engaging in sin. This is not about losing our salvation. Nowhere does the Bible teach this as doctrine. Either you are backslidden—as in *turned from the faith*, or, you never had it (Matt. 13:1-33; John 6:37-40; 10:28-29; 17:2-24; Rom. 8:28-39; Phil. 1:6; 1 Cor. 1:8; 9:1; 1 Thess. 5:23-24; 2 Thess. 3:32; 2 Tim. 1:12; 4:18; Heb. 11: 6). The faith they had was either not genuine (Heb. 6:4-8; 2 Pet. 2:20-21), or the circumstances of life strangled them as their eyes strayed from Jesus as Lord (Gal. 6:1; Col. 1:19-23; 1 Thess. 5:16-18; James 1:9). The urgency of this is that if a Christian has a bad attitude or is in sin, he/she dishonors the church, gives a false impression, and scandalizes the rest of us in the faith (Eccl. 9:18; Heb. 2:1).
- In 1 John 5:16, we find a parallel theme with this passage in James: *sin that leads to death*. Both James and John are attacking the position of *Gnosticism*, which denied the reality of Christ’s physical body, incarnation, and the separation of our body and spirit, and led to the rationalization of immorality. Thus, the meaning is about God’s judgment—that unrepentant sin can lead to “spiritual death,” or to “physical death” by the consequences of the sin such as disease (1 Cor. 11:30; Rev 21:8).
- *Truth*, refers to the Word of God, as the precepts of the Gospel and Scripture (John 17:17).
- *Turns a sinner.* The church is a community of interconnecting people who are in Christ; it is not to be selfish or individualistic. We are, as a church, called to encourage and mutually care for the people. If a Christian is in sin, then it is our call to help them be restored. Real ministry is in the care of individuals over all else; teaching is imperative, programs are essential, buildings are important, but if there is no care or love in them, if we are not connecting and touching one another, then all is worthless (1 Cor 13:1-3; James 1:27; 2:1-4, 14-16)!

- *Covers a multitude of sins* refers to, in that time and culture, not to spread a bad report. It also means securing forgiveness. Thus, the badness does not get back to God; it is forgiven (Prov. 10:12; 11:13; 20:19)!
- *Cover* refers to God's atonement. Jesus, literally by His shed blood, covers our sin so that God does not see it nor is affected by it, so He can forgive, give us grace, and bring us into the kingdom. In the OT, "cover" meant to reconcile two opposing parties with an offering or gift that was sacrificial in nature. For us, we are reconciled to God through Christ, who made amends to "cover us" and please God's wrath on our behalf. Everyone has sinned and everyone needs atonement (Lev. 17:11; Job 15:14-16; Psalm 5:4-6; 32:1; 85:2; Isa. 53:4-6; 64:6; Jer. 44:4; Hab. 1:13; Matt. 27:37; Luke 22:37; John 2:2; 4:10; Rom. 10: 2-3; Gal. 3:13; 4:4; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14-22; 2:14; Heb. 2:17; 9:11-15; Rev. 1:5). Thus, our redemption is through Christ's blood and suffering which was the sacrifice to bind us, in good relationship, with our Creator and Lord. We model this by seeking to reconcile with others!

We are called to come together. Do not let bad situations or bad people get you down, nor cause you to compromise biblical precepts or your character! Never close the Bible or neglect prayer; your spiritual journey and your trust and growth in Him will be your anchor to weather the storms. Do not allow yourself to suffer in your spiritual pilgrimage because of someone else. Remember, the church is filled with hypocrites because you and I are there. We are not perfect; we make mistakes. People, including Christians, will always disappoint you, but God will never disappoint you in reality. You are still God's special child (Col. 3:1-4)! Do not let yourself fall to the world's way, regardless of what the other person does. Do not allow the misguided ways of others get you off of God's path. Even if you are angry with God, He still loves you and has His best for you. Give your hurt and those who have hurt you over to God; He is the one who dispenses justice and revenge, not you (Hebrews 12:6)!

Having been to Europe many times for mission endeavors, not to mention my postgraduate studies in England, I often wondered about all those medieval torture devices I had seen in the museums that I frequently visited and in the literature I read. Why in the world would people, claiming to be Christians, put other human beings into an "iron maiden" or a "rack," or some other heinous torture device? It boggled my mind and I had very condescending thoughts for such individuals (which I still do). However, while researching my article on "hell," I gained a glimpse of why they carried out such torturous endeavors

In the Middle Ages, the fear of hell was absolutely overwhelming, and to forsake God and the church and venture to hell was the very worst thing that a person could conceive of or endure. So, a righteous person who was unacquainted with the precepts of Scripture (consider that the Bible was not translated or read in that time, so the concepts of the Fruit of the Spirit or this passage would not have been known, and, if so, very skewed), concluded in a

medieval way, that all means necessary must be involved to prevent a person from straying from the church so they would not go to hell. This included placing a person on a rack and stretching them until their spine broke in half. As long as a person repented, their eternal salvation was assured and the condition of their body did not make any difference.

I am not condoning such acts; but, when we comprehend the reality and impact of a person who strays from the truth and engages in sin, what are we willing to do about it? We are not to dust off our ancient torture devices, but we are to do our best, in the parameters of the Fruit of the Spirit, to bring that person back to the Kingdom.

Allow your faith to remain in Him regardless of what is going outside of your self or inside with your feelings. He will give you all you need; He will water, cultivate, and harvest, and give you the mercy and tenderness to go on. We must allow our faith to build so it does not bring us down or motivate others negatively. Because, the great hope is still to come; He is coming back. And, when He does, our suffering will be ended and it will not have been in vain. We will see the purpose and marvel at it as it will have made us better and stronger. So, let us keep our focus on Him just as the farmer looks to rain; He is our hope and reason, and He will carry us through; He will lift us up.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me? How am I encouraged and strengthened?
4. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
5. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
6. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
7. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
8. What can I model and teach? What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. What is care? How do you show care? Why is having personal concern for others important?
2. How does Jesus show us the ultimate care? How do you feel about His love and care for you personally? How can knowing more about His care for you help you respond to others with His care?
3. How does it make you feel knowing that Jesus will do all it takes to get you back on the path of His plan and will, the best for you? Why would we choose not to take His care?
4. How do you know if a person wanders off from your church? Can you detect the signs when people are disconnected or dissatisfied with your church? How do you help those who are struggling with their church or with sin? How long do you wait? When have you waited too long? Why do most Christians do nothing to bring back a wandering brother?
5. How have you wandered from the faith or seen others do so? What are some of the causes that give us grounds to wander from God's loving and best path?
6. Why do you suppose most people leave a church? Why do you suppose Christians tend to turn on one another with the works of Gal. 5:18-20? Have you, or have you seen other Christians turn on one another in a bad way? How so, and why?
7. How do the temptations of the world appeal to you when the frustrations of trials are getting to you? What can you do to see Christ and not your circumstances?
8. How does a Christian who has a bad attitude or who is in sin dishonor the church, give a false impression, and even scandalize the rest of those in the faith?
9. A church is a community of interconnecting people who are in Christ, whose call it is to encourage and mutually care for its people. How does this knowledge influence you to be on guard not to be selfish or individualistic?
10. People, including Christians, will always disappoint you, but God will never disappoint you in reality. So, how can you allow your faith to remain in Him regardless of what is going on outside of your self or inside with your feelings?
11. What can you do to keep people better connected in your church? What can you do to reach out to those who engage in sin and/or leave the church?

12. What would your church look like if the leaders and the people showed, by demonstration, real, authentic love and the hospitality of our Lord Jesus Christ? What would it take to make this happen? What will you do about it?

Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Proverbs 3:3

This concludes our series in the Epistle of James. I pray that you found it insightful, challenging, and profitable. Next week we will be veering to the Epistle of 1 Peter!

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