

5. James 5 of a Verse by Verse Study of James, 1 Peter, and 2 Peter

As with the previous chapters of James, James proceeds in chapter 5 to speak of those obligations that Christians have in leading a godly, moral, and personal life. Each of these admonitions echoes the teachings of Jesus in the gospels. James first admonishes against rich people who take advantage of the less fortunate, who may, in fact, work for them. His second admonition is that we wait patiently for the Lord to come again. Next, he admonishes us to be patient in the face of suffering. He adds that we are not to swear. He tells of the power of prayer in our lives. Finally, he discusses the need to restore sinners.

The Abusive Rich to Receive Misery

5:1 Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. 2 Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days.

James begins this rebuke of the rich with a direct allusion to the teaching of Jesus in Matt 6:19-21:

19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The Lord brings down those who are abusive of wealth in Rev 18:14-17:

14 "They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.' 15 The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn 16 and cry out:

"Woe! Woe, O great city,
dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet,
and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls!

17 In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!"

4 Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. 5 You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.

James does not leave us to speculate about the abuses of wealth. He specifies the wrongs: failing to pay workers, living in self-indulgence, condemning, and murdering. Wealth and self come first in this man's life. In the parable of the unmerciful servant, Jesus showed how the servant could be the evil one and not only the master. Jesus concluded in Matt 18:32-34,

32 "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' 34 In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

Patience until the Lord Comes

7 Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. 8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. 9 Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

This passage reiterates two lessons taught by Jesus: the Lord's coming is near; and with that coming,

the judge is standing at the door. Jesus taught that he and the ending will come like a thief in the night. In Matt 24:36, he said, "36 No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." In Matt 24:42, he repeated, "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come." With his coming, comes also the judgment as Paul taught in 2 Thess 1:6-10:

6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power 10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.

Truly, "the judge is standing at the door."

Patience in the Face of Suffering

10 Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

That we are to have patience in the face of suffering follows what Paul said in 2 Thess 1:6-7 above. God will give us relief. Peter spoke of that relief with certainty in 1 Peter 1:4-6:

4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

All of this teaching on suffering and endurance was forecast by the Lord in Matt 5:11-12: "11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Swearing Condemned

12 Above all, my brothers, do not swear – not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.

This teaching on swearing comes directly from the Lord in the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matt 5:34-37:

34 But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. 36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. 37 Simply let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No"; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

This swearing is not the affirmation of the truth as given in a courtroom where even the question expresses the absolute control of God in the phrase, "So help me God." This swearing is that which asserts our control, not God's control over the events and circumstances of life. As Christians face life, they may only say "yes" and "no." God controls everything by the power of his might.

The Power of Prayer in the Lives of Christians

13 Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. 14 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may

be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

17 Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. 18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

At the first glimpse of trouble, the Christian should pray. At the first ray of happiness, the Christian should sing. If one is sick, call the elders of the church to pray and anoint him with oil. Clearly, we are to use whatever medicinal remedies we have and take advantage of any medical care available. These prayers offered in faith will make the difference. Ps 103:2-5 expresses what should be the firm belief of Christians:

2 Praise the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits –
3 who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
4 who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,
5 who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

The prayer of the righteous man is powerful and effective.

The Need to Restore Sinners

19 My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

All Christians should try to bring back those who have wandered from the truth. The wonderful result is that that person is saved from death, for sin leads to death. The wages of sin is death in Rom 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Therefore, to turn one from sin covers those sins, and the sinner is once again pure before the Lord.

John tells us that if we see a brother committing a sin not unto death, we should pray for him. In 1 John 5:16-17:

16 If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. 17 All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

We should all pay attention to our brothers' and sisters' spiritual need for our prayers and should offer them without being asked.