



James 5:19-20 Covering a Multitude of Sins:
The Compassionate End of the Epistle of James
May 22, 2016

Text: James 5:19-20

We began James in February, 2015. We said then that...

- “Often called “the Proverbs of the New Testament,” the book of James practically and faithfully reminds Christians how to **live**. From perseverance to true faith to controlling one’s tongue, submitting to God’s will, and having patience, this book aids readers in living authentically and wisely for Christ.” –ESV Bible
- Saints, we are a church that has **LEARNED** a lot. We must transition to a church that **LIVES** a lot...where we take what we have learned and actually apply it. Our particular call demands it.
- There is a spiritual blockage...a wall between our knowledge and our willingness to do what God says. It's a hard place for us...and a place of opportunity where Satan can get his foot in (Eph 4:27). I believe that's why I was so strongly impressed towards James. James urges us to trust God and obey by faith.
- The truth is, if we kinda’ sorta’ wander out on the battlefield, uncommitted to Christ’s Word, we are going to take lots of damage.
- **BUT, if we are determined to, in love and grace, follow Christ I believe God will use us!**

Written by the Lord’s brother James between 40-50 AD, this early epistle has indeed given us a window into the teaching of the early church. You might recall that James himself, walked the talk, and was martyred in 62 AD:

- *At the age of ninety-four he was beat and stoned by the Jews; and finally had his brains dashed out with a fuller's club.*
– Foxes Book of Martyrs
- *But after Paul, in consequence of his appeal to Cæsar, had been sent to Rome by Festus, the Jews, being frustrated in their hope of entrapping him by the snares which they had laid for him, turned against James, the brother of the Lord, to whom the episcopal seat at Jerusalem had been entrusted by the apostles. The following daring measures were undertaken by them against him.*

Leading him into their midst they demanded of him that he should renounce faith in Christ in the presence of all the people. But, contrary to the opinion of all, with a clear voice, and with greater boldness than they had anticipated, he spoke out before the whole multitude and confessed that our Saviour and Lord Jesus is the Son of God. But they were unable to bear longer the testimony of the man who, on account of the excellence of ascetic virtue and of piety which he exhibited in his life, was esteemed by all as the most just of men, and

consequently they slew him. Opportunity for this deed of violence was furnished by the prevailing anarchy, which was caused by the fact that Festus had died just at this time in Judea, and that the province was thus without a governor and head.

—Eusebius

Why was it written?

1. James is a letter of pastoral encouragement and at times, rebuke. It seems that his flock, wherever they might be, had become a bit **worldly**. Oh friends, this continues to be a major problem for the Lord's church! We are so worldly in general. We take our cues from the world. We try to please the world. We even interpret the Lord's Word through worldly lenses. May the Lord deliver us.
2. James, writing from a Jewish perspective, emphasizes living out one's faith, regardless of **circumstances**. Apparently, early Christians and we "late" Christians aren't too dissimilar; we all need reminding that "faith without works is dead!" 😊
3. James Adamson writes, "James is addressing people who are supposed to know the rudiments of Christianity; and his aim, as in the Sermon on the Mount, is to set forth the theonomic life in its essentials, that is, life lived according to God's Law. James' task, like Paul in his epistles, is mainly practical, to help the sincere to live up to their faith, and very often to correct errors, misunderstandings, and backslidings resulting in conduct unworthy of the Christian faith."
4. James makes no provision for "culture," "contextualization," or "blending in." On the contrary, James calls Christians to be Christians and the Church to be the Church. The church is not called to blend in but to come out, just as Israel was.
5. James is often accused of "lacking grace" like Paul or "love" like John. But like all Scripture, his writings are **complementary** with Paul's and John's...not contradictory.
6. Note his own **humility** in verse one: a brother of our Lord second, His servant first. If familiarity with Jesus bred contempt at one time, his salvation certainly changed things! 😊

Today's Text:

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins. (Jam 5:19-20 KJV)

1. As we have seen, James is indeed quite the manual for the "theonomic life." But as we've also mentioned, James can be misunderstood as an unloving "law book."
2. In truth, the entire Epistle has **grace** as its root! *Biblical grace* is not only God giving us what we do not deserve, but also trains us for holiness:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. (Titus 2:11-14)

3. Friends, throughout this Epistle, I submit we see the loving heart of this leader, and the loving heart of God who inspired His writings.
4. We see James' loving desire for the joy of the flock even during times of persecution (Jam 1:2-4), the wisdom of the saints that they might walk in stability (Jam 1:5-8), for humble living (Jam 1:9-15), for obedience that defeats deception (Jam 1:22), and for ministry to widows and orphans (Jam 1:26).
5. We see James defend the poor against partiality (Jam 2:1-13), going so far as to strongly exhort the great royal law: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (2:8)
6. We see James teaching a warring faith...a faith that goes beyond words to action! (Jam 2:14-26)
7. We see James recognize the damage the tongue can do to the Body and safeguard his people against it in the strongest terms. (Jam 3)
8. Saints, James has essentially laid out a Holy Spirit-inspired case to turn wayward saints back to the God who loves them!
 - His passion for the lives of the redeemed is obvious! His desire is that they "submit to God" and "resist the devil." (Jam 4:7) THAT CAN ONLY BE FOR THEIR GOOD!
 - He wants them to "draw near to God" that God might "draw near to [them]." (Jam 4:8) THAT CAN ONLY BE FOR THEIR GOOD!
 - He wants them to break friendships with the world! (Jam 4:4) THAT CAN ONLY BE FOR THEIR GOOD!
 - He wants them to be more conscious of the sovereignty of God! (Jam 4:13-17) THAT CAN ONLY BE FOR THEIR GOOD!
9. And now we see his loving goal in more clarity:

James wants to find the wanderer. He wants them to turn back to the truth. He wants the mind of the backslider converted and his sin covered by love. To do this...to be the kind of people who are willing to reach out this way, requires Godly, Spirit-given, LOVE.

10. I believe these verses primarily apply, not to an unbeliever, but to a believer. William MacDonald writes:

Verse 19 describes a Christian brother who has wandered away from the truth, either in doctrine or in practice. Another brother makes this a matter of fervent, believing prayer, and thus lovingly turns him back to fellowship with God and with his brothers and sisters in Christ. How immense is the significance of this ministry! First of all, he will save his erring brother from dying prematurely under the chastening hand of God. Also they are forgiven by fellow believers and veiled from the gaze of the outside world. We need this ministry today. In our zeal to evangelize the lost, perhaps we do not give sufficient attention to those sheep of Christ who have wandered from the fold.

Of course, the question comes up about true salvation. But contextually (and by personal experience, if we are honest), the responsibility of a loving, Christ-exalting church to care about professing believers who seem to be stumbling is without question.

11. The Apostle Peter writes:

*The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, **since love covers a multitude of sins**. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet 4:7-11)*

Dear friends, if we decide to show increased love one to another, I believe God will pour out increased love for the lost!

Who do you know that is stumbling due to falling into doctrinal or practical error? Or caught up in a vice or sin? Or stuck in unforgiveness, unable to move? Or hemmed up by gossip or false accusation? Or by deciding to be a hearer not a doer, is falling away from the Lord and His Church? Are you willing to love enough to go get them?

In Closing:

Now having seen the compassion and love embedded in this letter, let us remember what we learned from this time in James:

1. That our zeal to obey the Lord (a key theme in James) would be matched by our zeal to **love** one another.
2. That we would again see the call to obedience as a loving response to our **loving** God.
3. That we would practically change; that we'd see noticeable shifts in our walk and talk.
4. That our patience would increase.
5. That our resistance of the devil would increase.
6. That our generosity would increase.
7. That we would rise up in faith and put that faith into **practice!**

May this Summer be transformational for us. May our love-based obedience and joy in God, and our Christ-based, Gospel-centered love for one another EXPLODE. May we begin to bear Gospel fruit to overflowing. May your families be blessed and strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And may the Pattern House God has called for emerge: humble, obedient, loving, merciful, and joyful, regardless of what the world does.

In Jesus' Name, Amen!