

# BIBLE SERIES: "EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"

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## JAMES 4-5 – GODLY HUMILITY; AGAINST UNJUST RICH; ANOINTING



We begin today with a Scripture we started studying the last time, James 4:11-12, "Brethren do not *murmur* against one another. He who murmurs against his brother and judges his brother, murmurs against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not *a doer of the law*, but a judge. There is only one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you that you should judge [or condemn] another?"

So James admonishes us to be humble and not be judgmental or self-righteous, as Christ warned in Mt. 7:1-5 about seeing the mote in the eye of the other and not the plank in your own eye. Paul tells us not to be harsh or haughty dealing with the sins of others, saying, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in *a spirit of gentleness*, considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1).

We know we will be judged by God's holy laws, and that we are not judges giving verdicts, but doers. In fact, we won't know how well we did before Christ until the end of our lives. He is the Judge, the Lawgiver and King of kings and not us. So, let us be humble, loving and merciful to all.

With that humility toward others in mind, James points out we should also humbly take God into account in our plans and trips and not be cocky or overconfident. He warns: "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit;' whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even of vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. *Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.'* But now you *boast in your arrogance*. All such boasting is *evil*. Therefore, to him who *knows* to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:13-17).

This principle of taking God into account in our plans is also found in Proverbs 27:1, "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth." So we should plan our lives with God at the center. Paul gave an example of this when he said, "For I do not wish to see you now on the way; but I *hope* to stay a while with you, *if the Lord permits*" (1 Cor. 16:7).

We now come to the fifth and final chapter of James where he focuses again on the need of *faith being accompanied by works*. As he said in the last verse of chapter 4, if we know what we ought to do and don't do it, it is a sin, for we have not applied Jesus' golden rule: "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, *do also to them*, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Mt. 7:12).

Hence, there are sins of *commission* (of doing what is wrong), but there are also sins of *omission* (avoiding doing what is right). Failure to act when we should is a sin. That *lack of love and good works at a key time can cause all kinds of evils*, such as the *greed* James saw in that selfish society and especially what the unrighteous rich did. He warns them about the coming disaster upon them.

He says: "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth [Hebrew for Hosts or Armies]. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you" (James 5:1-6).

This was the case because most Christians were poor and many were ruthlessly exploited by the rich. James tells those unjust rich that God is watching them from heaven and will punish them. And so He did. James died around A.D. 62 and four years later the war of the Jews against Rome started and destroyed almost everything in Israel. For the rich it was particularly disastrous, as they lost their possessions and were reduced to slaves.

The unjust rich had been breaking God's laws that protected the poor and they reaped the consequences. In Deut. 24:14-15 it says: "You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether one of your brethren or one of the aliens who is in your land within your gates. Each day you

shall give him his wages, and not let the sun go down on it, for he is poor and has set his heart on it; lest he cry out against you to the Lord, and it *be sin to you*." So, God cares about injustices.

Barclay mentions: "No...reader of the Bible can fail to be impressed with the *social passion* which blazes through its pages. *No book condemns dishonest and selfish wealth with such searing passion as it does*...One of the mysteries of social thought is how the Christian religion ever came to be regarded as 'the opiate of the people' [by communist Karl Marx] or to seem to be an otherworldly affair. *There is no book in any literature, which speaks so explosively of social injustice as the Bible*, nor any book, which has proved so powerful a social [cure]. It does not condemn wealth as such but there is *no book* which more strenuously insists on *wealth's responsibility* and on the perils which surround a man who is abundantly blessed with this world's goods."

As a result, James advises the brethren to bear patiently injustices of the world, especially by the unjust rich and not get bitter towards them. He reminds them that Christ will come one day to correct all of this. He says: "Therefore *be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord*. See how *the farmer* waits for the precious fruit of the earth, *waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain*. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!" (James 5:7-9).

He then uses *the prophets* and *Job* as examples of perseverance, stating, "My brethren, take the *prophets*, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of *suffering and patience*. Indeed, we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of *the perseverance of Job* and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful" (James 5:10-11).

The word for "patience" in the Greek is *makrothymia* and it is better translated as "longsuffering." It means to wait patiently and not lash out or get bitter in the face of trials until succeeding in overcoming them. He uses the example of the farmer, who doesn't look passively at the grain to grow on its own, by actively works

the soil, doing his part and trusting God will provide the rest in order to be harvested.

As *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary* explains, "Keep in mind that the farmer does not stand around doing nothing: he is constantly at work as he looks toward the harvest. James did not tell these suffering believers to put on white robes, climb a hill, and wait for Jesus to return. 'Keep *working and waiting*' was his admonition. 'Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when He cometh *shall find so doing*'" (Luke 12:43).

"Nor does the farmer get into fights with his neighbors. One of the usual marks of farmers is their willingness to help one another. Nobody on the farm has time or energy for disputes with the neighbors. James must have had this in mind when he added, 'Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged' (James 5:9 NIV). Impatience with God often leads to impatience with God's people, and this is a sin we must avoid. If we start using the sickles on each other, we will miss the harvest!"

James then delivers another teaching of Jesus--avoiding taking oaths (Mt. 5:37). He says: "But above all, my brethren, *do not swear*, either by heaven or by earth or *with any other oath*. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No,' lest you fall into *judgment*" (Jam. 5:12). This is *why* we should not take oaths, although we can *affirm* something, an equivalent to a yes, but not using God's name.

This epistle ends by explaining in a practical way what to do in different situations or states of mind. He asks, "Is anyone among you *suffering*? *Let him pray*. Is anyone *cheerful*? *Let him sing psalms*. Is anyone among you *sick*? *Let him call for the elders of the church*, and let them *pray over him, anointing him with oil* in the name of the Lord. And the *prayer of faith* will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven" (5:13-15).

First, James focuses on those who are *suffering or in trouble*. As Wiersbe mentions, "The word of afflicted means 'suffering in difficult circumstances.' The phrase 'in trouble' is a good translation...As God's people go through life; they often must endure difficulties that are *not the results of sin or the chastening of God*. What should we do when we find ourselves in such trying

circumstances? We must not grumble and criticize the saints who are having an easier time of it (James 5:9); nor should we blame the Lord. We should pray, asking God for *the wisdom* we need to *understand* the situation and use it to His glory (James 1:5).

“Prayer can remove affliction, if that is God’s will. But prayer can also give us the *grace* we need to endure troubles and use them to accomplish God’s perfect will. God can transform troubles into triumphs. ‘He giveth more grace’ (James 4:6). Paul prayed that God might change his circumstances, but instead, God gave Paul the grace he needed to turn his weakness into strength (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Our Lord prayed in Gethsemane that that cup might be removed, and it was not; yet the Father gave Him *the strength* He needed to go to the cross [or stake] and die for our sins.

“James indicated that everybody does not go through troubles at the same time: ‘Is any cheerful? Let him sing psalms’ (James 5:13). God balances our lives and gives us hours of suffering and days of singing. The mature Christian knows how to sing while he is suffering. (Anybody can sing after the trouble has passed.)...He did this for Paul and Silas when they were suffering in that Philippian jail. ‘And at midnight Paul and Silas *prayed, and sang praises unto God*’ (Acts 16:25).”

Regarding *anointing the sick*, oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38) and represents the power of God to heal the sick. Christ instructed His Apostles to *anoint the sick with olive oil* (Mark 6:13). If the sickness is due to sin, the prayer of faith will serve to have it forgiven. But remember, this prayer is *a petition* and *not a demand* before God. We must remember the words of Jesus: “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup [of suffering] pass from me; *nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will*” (Mt. 26:39). Also John stated, “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything *according to His will, He hears us*. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that *we have the petitions* that we have asked of Him” (1 John 5:14-15).

Regarding *physicians*, the Bible never forbids the use of doctors, but it does condemn relying *solely* on them, as King Asa did (2 Chr.16:12).

As Edersheim notes, “Luke was a ‘physician’ (Col. 4:14), and among the Temple officials was a physician whose duty it was to assist the priesthood...The rabbis commanded that every city should have at least one physician, who was also trained in surgery...Prescriptions consisted of simples, compounds, vegetables being employed rather than minerals. Cold water compresses, the external and internal use of oil and wine, baths, and a certain diet, were widely used remedies” (*Sketches of Jewish Life*, pp. 180-181).

James mentions we should be aware of the sick and pray for them. “Confess your trespasses to one another [in this case, health problems], and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man avails much” (5:16). He uses the example of Elijah, who despite a lapse of faith, prayed and it had a great effect.

Incidentally, Barclay mentions about Catholics using James 5:14 to institute what they call the “Sacrament of Extreme Unction.” He says, “For many centuries the Church consistently used anointing as *a means of healing the sick*. In fact, it is important to note that the sacrament of unction, or *anointing*, was in the early centuries always *designed as a means of cure, and not as a preparation for death* as it now is in the Roman Catholic Church. It was *not until A.D. 852* that this sacrament did, in fact, *become* the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, administered to prepare for death.” Shockingly, here is another example of an abominable, deceptive, man-made religious law!

In closing, James urges again to help or go after the lost brethren, as Jesus taught in Mt. 18:12-14. He says: “Brethren, if any among you *wanders from the truth*, and someone *turns him back*, let him know that *he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins*” (James 5:19-20).

Consequently, if we have mercy and love towards our erring brethren, we can also receive God’s forgiveness for our own sins. Christ said: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Mt. 5:7). Sometimes, however, the person does not want to return and we cannot force or beg him, for as Paul says: “Each one shall bear his own load” (Gal. 6:5). As the saying goes, “You can lead a horse to water but you can’t make him drink.”