



You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand (James 5:8).

Devotional

Regrettably, some have neglected the study of the book of James because they consider it to be unconcerned with deep matters of theology. This view is unfortunate because it implies that the way we treat other people is not as important to the Christian faith as is the doctrine of God or any other topic covered in systematic theology.

Good systematic theology is impossible without good practical theology just as good practical theology is impossible without good systematic theology. The book of James is a fine example of this. In places like today's passage, we can clearly see how his admonitions are grounded in a deep understanding of Christian doctrine.

At the beginning of James 5, we examined the dire warnings that James issued to rich oppressors. These rich had defrauded their employees, and they had impatiently stored up treasures for themselves (5:1–4). Their actions were in keeping with the wisdom of this world, which leads to the arrogant and willful disobedience to the Lord of the universe (3:14–16). Yet this oppression will not last forever. God will judge them at the last day, and for them it will be a day of slaughter (5:5).

However, this day has not yet arrived. Therefore, as today's passage tells us, we are to wait patiently for it (v. 7). This day is near, indeed it is “at hand” (v. 8), and has been ever since Christ ascended. But we do not know when it will be, and we must wait, for it is sure to come.

As he did in 1:2–4, James again calls us to patience and endurance. A proper understanding of eschatology (the doctrine of the end times) enables him to do this. Presently, many Christians are oppressed. The faithful do not always succeed and are often hated by the world. Biblical eschatology tells us that this will be the lot of many believers until Jesus returns. Though the Bible calls us to fight for justice when we are able, we must always realize that the rule of God and His people will not be fully visible or experiential until Jesus' return. Therefore, we must work to build the kingdom, avoiding the temptation

to grumble against others in the midst of our strife (5:9), while at the same time remaining aware that at the return of Christ, our patient and consistent following of Him will be rewarded.

CORAM DEO (In the Presence of God)

Presently, the people of God suffer under the rule of ungodly men. Yet, as we have read today, one day this will all be reversed. We must, therefore, wait patiently for this day, working to help spread the good news of the kingdom. As Calvin says, “the confusion of things which is now seen in the world will not be perpetual, because the Lord at his coming will reduce things to order, and that therefore our minds ought to entertain good hope.”

Open it

1. What event or occasion have you found yourself looking forward to with great anticipation? Did it live up to your expectations?

Read it

JAMES 5:7-12

Explore it

2. What does James call us to be patient for?
3. What example does he give to illustrate such patience?
4. What shouldn't we do towards others while we are waiting on the Lord?
5. What two people(s) should we look to in our time of suffering?
6. What should be our response to others instead of oaths?

HE IS COMING BACK...SOON!!!

James encourages his readers to be patient in light of the fact that the Lord's coming is near. What did he mean by this? Many scholars think that James' conviction that the return of Christ was "near" was an overly enthusiastic hope which we now know was disappointed.

If this were the case, the legitimacy of the course of action James here suggests would be called into serious question: of what value would such advice be when the basic understanding of the course of history on which it is based is mistaken? The accusation that James has erred on this matter rests on the supposition that James believed that the *parousia* (The coming of the Lord) must necessarily occur within a very brief period of time. But there is no reason to think that this was the case.

The early Christians' conviction that the *parousia* was "near" or "imminent" meant that they fully believed that it could transpire within a very short period of time, **not that it had to**. They, like Jesus, knew neither "that day or hour" (Mark 13: 32), but they acted, and taught others to act, as if their generation could be the last. Almost twenty centuries later, we live in exactly the same situation: our own decade could be the last in human history. **And James' advice to us is the same as it was to his first-century readers: be patient and stand firm!**³

12. James 5:7 tells Christians to patiently wait for Christ's return. How could this command be abused? How does the example of the farmer help to guide us as we wait for the Lord's coming?

13. Read aloud Revelation 21:1–5. What do you think heaven will be like? How can a robust understanding and anticipation of heaven help us to remain steadfast even during our difficult times here on earth?

³ Moo, Douglas J.. James (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) (Kindle Locations 3417–3418). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

COMPLAINING & GRUMBLING

At first glance, verse 9 doesn't seem to fit into the context. It seems that James should have put it in back in 4:11, when he talked about not judging one another. But a moment's reflection reveals why he put it here. **When you're under pressure from the outside (5:1–8), it's easy to take out your frustrations on those who are closest to you, even though they're not the source of your problems.** If you have a difficult, ungodly boss who harasses you, it's easy to snap at your wife or kids over minor issues, even though they're not the cause of your irritation.

The Greek word translated “complain” means, literally, to groan. Donald Burdick explains (Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. By Frank Gaebelein [Zondervan], 12:202), “It speaks of inner distress more than open complaint. What is forbidden is not the loud and bitter denunciation of others but the unexpressed feeling of bitterness or the smothered resentment that may express itself in a groan or a sigh.”

So maybe you restrain yourself from saying something caustic or exploding in anger, but you roll your eyes and shake your head in derision. Your body language communicates your disapproval of the other person. James says, “Don't do that!” As Warren Wiersbe says (Be Mature [Victor Books], p. 156), “If we start using the sickles on each other, we will miss the harvest!”⁴

14. The original audience was experiencing a similar struggle, yet they responded differently to them. Just like today, some got quiet and reserved when trouble came, while others were filled with despair; still others became filled with anger and rage. What is your response to the troubles of life? How can this type of response be useful? How might it cause more harm than good?

15. James is clear: do not grumble against one another. What are some things that you find yourself grumbling about? How does grumbling help us feel better and how does it hurt others?

⁴ Sermon by Steve Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-20-responding-rightly-when-you%E2%80%99re-wronged-james-57-9>

We are called to speak out against injustice. You may wish to vent your discontent, but make sure you do not blow it out of proportion or just wallow in it for self-pity's sake. Complaining serves only to stir the discords of strife, increase stress, irritate others, and place the focus where it is not to be. There are times to get things off your chest, but it must be to actually get it off, not to keep poking at it so the stress sticks around and consumes you, drawing you away from Christ as Lord.⁵

16. How can we know when to patiently endure wrong treatment and when to confront the wrongdoer in love?

AN OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLE

We are to be patient like a prophet: speaking the truth. Much like the farmer, the prophet reminds us that patience does not necessarily mean inactivity. A farmer doesn't just sit back waiting for the rain: he works. Likewise, a prophet in the middle of persecution stood boldly and spoke out against injustice. In the middle of hardship, we are to speak about the goodness, the greatness, the judgment, and the mercy of God. Times of suffering are often the most golden opportunity to speak a word for the glory of God.

We need patience like Job: hoping in God's purpose. James says, "You have heard of Job's endurance and have seen the outcome from the Lord" (James 5: 11). What an understatement! Remember that it took 42 chapters for the purpose of suffering in Job's life to be revealed, and only at the end did he confess, "I had heard rumors about You, but now my eyes have seen You. Therefore I take back my words and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42: 5-6). **This is a good reminder for us: Whatever you are walking through is not the end of the story. The end will reveal that the Lord is indeed "very compassionate and merciful" (James 5: 11). You can't see it, but be patient, hoping in God's purpose.**⁶

17. Why doesn't God always protect those who are serving Him from trials and persecution? What purposes does He accomplish through these hardships?

⁵ Patience in Suffering found @ <http://70030.netministry.com/images/James57-12.pdf> © 2005 Rev. R. J. Krejcir Ph.D. Into Thy Word Ministries www.intothyword.org

⁶ Platt, David. Exalting Jesus In James (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (Kindle Locations 1905-1914). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

LET YOUR YES BE YES AND NO BE NO.

To understand James' words here, we must understand how the Jews of that day were using oaths. Oaths ought to foster truthful communication, but in reality they had become a façade for lying. The Jews said that if you swore using God's name in your oath, you had to keep your word, but if you swore by some lesser thing—Jerusalem, the temple, or whatever—you were not bound. Jesus confronts this in Matthew 23:16-22. This was the situation behind Jesus' command in the Sermon on the Mount, not to make any oaths at all, but to "let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'" (Matthew 5:37). In other words, the real issue was speaking the truth at all times.

18. In what ways are people tempted to compromise their integrity by going back on their word?

19. When has your truthfulness served you or the gospel well? When has the truth brought more trouble?

20. In which area that James addresses could you use the spiritual fruit of patience in your life? Make it your desire to honor His gift of patience by showing it to others in both word and deed.