

CHAPTER X

RESIST FIERCELY, BRETHREN!

James 5:7-12

Introduction

After the very vivid account of the vengeance that belongs to God, and the just judgment that will come to their persecutor, James turns back to the Christian brethren to whom he is writing. "Don't let them shake you loose, brethren!" "You hang on to the very victory that God has promised in the end. This victory is sure to come. God is still our leader and His oversight real. So don't murmur nor complain. The Judge has it all in hand, even as He did with the prophets of old. So let your word be as constant and sure as is His Word. Speak the truth without deception and remain on the victorious side of the Lord."

Not only does the Holy Spirit in this instance champion the justice that is sure to come against the persecutors, but He assures of the reward of grace that is to be received by His own. The noteworthy thing about the Biblical justice is that God is the judge and the avenger. Justice is His business and He assures us He will take care of it. He has not given to man the authority for vengeance. The sword He has put into the hands of governments is not for vengeance, but rather to give His own army a measure of peace and protection in carrying out the spiritual warfare of this life. Though the earthly murderers fear not the wrath of God, being unbelievers in His Word, they yet fear death through capital punishment and so are forced to inhibit, or at least hide, their murderous actions.

Another point of justice that is clear in both the book of James and in the other Scriptures is God's insistence upon social justice. In the Old Testament, as well as the New, the prophets have preached vigorously against injustices toward the poor. (Isa. 5:8; Amos 3:10; 5:11; 8:4-7; 11:28; etc). Feeding the hungry and caring for the orphans and widows (but not the indolent lay people) is a common concern of God's Word. A heart that weeps over the suffering of others is God's kind of heart. So it is that 'Jesus wept'. So it

is that He looked over Jerusalem and considered her destiny, and wept. So it is that the horrible lostness that is in the world today brings grief to Him, and to the saint who has His spirit as well. But His weeping over Lazarus' death was a grief for the suffering relatives that were left broken hearted. Jesus wept because they suffered.

How often the church neglects this sympathy that is to be shared with Christ. How often the needy are overlooked, and those who suffer for physical needs and in bodily torments are neglected by the prosperous church. Not only do the saints often neglect the visitation and encouragement to the saints in the "old folk's homes", but they often send their own members and relatives to be among those numbers who are forgotten and neglected. Countless numbers in the hospitals who could be won to Christ in their great physical distress are often left to suffer alone. The saints will rally in support of a dramatic case of need reported in the newspapers but they as often neglect the unadvertized and numberless needy on their very doorsteps. "Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction . . ." James 1:27. The gospel is damaging for social justice, and we do not need the "Social Gospel" to develop this facet of Christianity. The Holy Spirit has already done so in the Word of God. Nor must we use rejection of the Social Gospel as an excuse for neglecting our plainly revealed duties for sympathetic help to the needy and fair treatment of those who are less fortunate and at our mercy.

HOLD YOURSELF IN CHECK

Text 5:7-9

- 5:7 Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it, until it receive the early and latter rain.
8. Be ye also patient; establish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord is at hand.
9. Murmur not, brethren, one against another that we be not judged: behold the judge standeth before the doors.

Queries

401. From your previous studies in this book, see if you can remember the true meaning of "patience" as it is used in the Scriptures.
402. To whom is James speaking in verses 7ff?
403. What is a "husbandman?" (If you are not sure, the context explains it. Note what the husbandman does).
404. How does the "coming of the Lord" in this section tie in with the warning to the rich in the previous section?
405. Note the "therefore" that introduces the reason for the former debate with the non-present rich unbeliever.
406. What is the reason given?
407. With what is Jesus comparing the end of the world in verse 7?
408. Note the repetition of the word "patient" in both the admonition and the illustration.
409. When the husbandman is "patient" over the fruit of harvest to come, what does this signify? (Remember the Biblical meaning of "patience").
410. v. 8 says "be ye also patient," why do we need this admonition?
411. How can we "establish" our hearts?
412. How can he say "the coming of the Lord is at hand" when Matt. 24:29ff says that certain things will come to pass before the coming of the Lord?
413. Was the coming of the Lord really "at hand" when nearly two thousand years have passed since this was written?
414. Is the coming of the Lord "at hand" today? What would we do in preparation?
415. How would the expected coming of the Lord keep the brethren from murmuring?
416. What might tempt us to murmur against one another?
417. For what were the Israelites judged in the wilderness? (See Num. 14:29; Deut. 1:27; I Cor. 10:10).
418. What is the significance of the phrase "standeth before the doors"?

Paraphrases

- A. 5:7. Don't be quick-tempered, but hold your mind in check until Christ is present again. See how the farmer does not ex-

pect his harvest on the day he plants but he is longsuffering in watching for it, giving it time to mature after the spring and summer rains.

8. In the same way you should hold yourself in check, also; and strengthen your spirits: for Christ will soon be present with us.
 9. Don't groan in complaints because of your impatience, brethren, or you will risk the condemnation of the Lord when He comes. Consider He is just around the corner and could come at any moment.
- B.*5:7. But on the other hand, you, dear brothers, be patient until the Lord returns. Be like a patient farmer who expects to wait until the autumn for his precious harvest to ripen.
8. Yes, be patient. And take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near.
 9. Don't grumble about each other, brothers. Are you yourselves above criticism? For see! the great Judge is coming, He is almost here; (let Him do whatever criticizing must be done).

Summary

And now brethren, speaking to you: be patient and constant with mutual forbearance; in view of the certainty and nearness of Christ's coming.

Comment

When James here says, "Be patient therefore . . ." he uses a different word for patience than the ordinary word used in the Scripture. The ordinary word means to stick like glue, or to hang on like a bulldog. This word, however, leans a bit closer to our modern usage of the word patience. It means to have submission, or be long-tempered. There still is a close relation in the meaning of the two words with more similarity than difference. In the middle of the verse James uses the same word to describe the submission to circumstances of the husbandman.

There certainly is a sense in which the Christian should be meek and submissive; and this is one of them. When the circumstances of

our environment become trying for us, we should execute all the more control to be meek and submissive to the will of the Lord. If we are convinced that God cares for us constantly and that all things both in heaven and on earth are under the authority of our Lord Christ Jesus, we should be all the more careful to be willing to submit ourselves to the trying circumstances He sees fit to allow us to bear. The key to contented living on this earth is not avoidances of trials, but rather the submission to the will of Christ that makes us content in whatever state we find ourselves. Impatience makes a person short-tempered; but James says here we should be long-tempered.

The reason for this holding of our mind in check is that the Lord will soon come. It will not be long, so hold out till He comes. Like a mother comforts her sick child, "It will be just a few minutes, honey. The doctor just phoned and said he was on his way over. Don't cry, because I think I hear him coming now!" So James comforts us in our trials of this life.

"Isn't it deceptive?" you may ask. "James said He was coming soon. Now nearly two thousand years have passed, and He hasn't come yet!" True enough. In Matt. 24:15-22 Jesus makes it clear that the imminent destruction of the temple would take place before the end of the world. After that, He could be expected at any moment. His coming would be sudden and would take people by surprise. James was not deceptive, however; for His coming was soon or imminent. And it still is. The admonition was not to watch for He would certainly come within a few days, but rather to "watch therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh." (Matt. 24:42) Jesus could come shortly from the time you read this; or it could be that He shall come before you ever get opportunity to read this. Then again, it may be years away. Our business is to watch and be ready.

The illustration, like all of those Jesus uses, is very vivid and simple. The farmer does not begin to rail nor show impatience with his wife because there are no crops the week after he has planted. He patiently waits for the normal seasons of rain and sun. His patience holds out even through the second rainy season and the second crop.

Palestine, like many areas the world over, has two rainy seasons for crop growth, thus the reference to the "early and latter rain." Grain was usually planted in time for the fall rains and matured with the latter rain of Spring. Even as the farmer is patient in waiting

for his crops, so must we be patient in waiting for the Lord.

One of the immediate results of lack of patience is groaning in complaint. This murmuring often makes life miserable for those who are closest. In the church it takes the form of groaning against a brother. It is as if he were at fault. He is present and it is the most convenient opportunity for venting the impatience. Likewise, husband or wife may have the same impatient reaction against the one who is most convenient to them. The lack of contentment becomes a miserable tirade against the one they love best. Since such loose usage of the tongue is clearly forbidden in the Scripture, the saint's impatience may make him in danger of the judgment. Since the judge can be expected at any moment, why let the impatience lead him to action over which he may be judged?

VICTORY WILL COME, FOR GOD IS REAL

Text 5:10-12

5:10 Take, brethren, for an example of suffering and patience, the prophets who spake in the name of the Lord.

11. Behold, we call them blessed that endured: ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, how that the Lord is full of pity, and merciful.
12. But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by the heaven, nor by the earth, nor by any other oath: but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay; that ye fall not under judgment.

Queries

419. What noteworthy example of hardship is omitted here but not in I Pet. 2:21ff?
420. Why were the O.T. prophets a good example to take?
422. The word for patience in 5:11 is the usual word meaning to hold tight without giving in. How is this descriptive of Job?
423. Is the teaching in verse twelve of special importance? Why (from the verse itself) must this be?
424. Solemn and serious civil and religious oaths or vows were taken on the name of God or His Word, and they still are. Why do you think this particular oath is not mentioned in verse twelve?

425. Is the subject really swearing, oath-taking, or truth-telling?
 426. What connection is there between swearing and lying?
 427. What are some of the similarities between this verse and Matt. 5:33-37?
 428. Where is lying introduced into the verse?

Paraphrases

- A. 5:10 For an example of a continued faith while enduring suffering, consider the Old Testament prophets. They continued to testify of God in the midst of their suffering.
11. Look how we call God's praises upon them because of their endurance. You have heard how Job was stubborn in clinging to the Lord; and you have read how God's mercy and pity gave Job a double restitution because of His purpose.
 12. And more than this, brethren, watch your daily speech that it is not sprinkled with the double standard of oaths for speaking the truth that you might have an excuse to lie. When you say something, let it be the truth, and this swearing and oath-taking will not be necessary.
- B.*5:10. For examples of patience in suffering, look at the Lord's prophets.
11. We know how happy they are now because they stayed true to Him then, even though they suffered greatly for it. Job is an example of a man who continued to trust the Lord in sorrow, and from his experiences we can see how the Lord's plan finally ended in good, and that the Lord is full of tenderness and mercy.
 12. But most of all, dear brothers, do not swear either by heaven or earth, or anything else; just say a simple "yes" or "no," so that you will not sin and receive God's curse.

Summary

When we consider the Old Testament examples we know that God's purpose is to make everything right. So let our word be as constant and sure as these prophets and we will avoid the common practice of swearing and oaths taking.

James is still referring to how to act under adversity. The major example of adversity of having one's wages withheld will be added to in the last portion of the chapter. Here he seems to still be commenting upon this particular problem.

The prophets, because of their very vocation, suffered the brunt of persecution. Through all of this they refused to murmur against the Lord; but rather continued to speak in His name. It has always been that a man who will take a definite stand, especially on matters pertaining to godliness, will make enemies. He makes the same enemies Jesus made, and in a sense bears the same kind of a cross. This is the plight of all who name the name of Christ as their own, and it must be so. "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 16:24-25).

The Job reference uses the same kind of "patience" that is most commonly used in the New Testament. This refers to his determination to hang on through all sufferings. He clung to the Lord like a bulldog, and the devil could not shake him loose.

The important part of the illustration is that Job's patience was rewarded by the Lord according to the will of the Lord. The *end* of the Lord refers to the *purpose* of the Lord. We have seen the purpose of the Lord in the account of Job: to benefit all on the Lord's side, including Job.

The *end* of the Lord could also refer to what happens in the end of the matter, or the end of time. Job was rewarded at the conclusion of his suffering; and such is always the "end" of the Lord. The end of the matter is not always apparent on this earth, however. In the case of the oppressing rich men just discussed, the end of the matter is in the judgment. If heaven is my home and joy unspeakable and full of glory is my destiny, by what ingratitude do I demand it all here and now?

If verse twelve is a continuation of the admonition on how to act in adversity, then its meaning is quickly determined. The prophets continued to speak in the name of the Lord when they were persecuted. Likewise we must continue to let our speech be honest and truthful regardless of the persecution.

The common practice of that day (and today?) was to use a

double standard of speaking. A "good" (?) business man was expected to lie concerning his business. If a man wanted to verify the fact that he was really telling the truth and not speaking out of the corner of his mouth, he would use an oath. Swearing and oath-taking became so common that if a man really wanted to deceive his fellow man he would sprinkle his conversation with oaths. At the trial of Jesus when the maid accused him of being one of the men with Jesus, on the second accusation Peter not only denied being with the Jesus, but did so with an oath (Matt. 26:72). On the third occasion when he was accused of being a friend of Jesus "then he began to curse and to swear, I know not the man." (Matt. 26:74). The oath here, as in many cases, was used as a clear effort to deceive.

Had Peter spoken the truth there would have been no need for an oath. They would have believed him anyway at once. The Christian should have his practice of always speaking the truth. When he says yes, he should mean yes. If he denies something, then those who know him know that his denial is the truth.

Most commentators do not believe that this prohibition is referring to the civil and religious oaths or vows that solemnly use the name of God for court uses. There is no mention of an oath that invoked the name or Word of God. We would expect that it would not be mentioned, for the Jews were by tradition most careful not to use God's name lightly as in street usage or common swearing. The point of the teaching is in the last part of the verse: "let your yea be yea and your nay, nay; that ye fall not under judgment." It would seem that this is an application of the example from the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Certainly if this teaching leaves any man with a conscience against taking the solemn oaths of the courts, then it would be a sin to him even if this were not the intended meaning of the text.

If this verse is not a continuation of the former discussion, and has as its main purpose any oath-taking rather than truth-telling, then the meaning becomes more difficult to ascertain. Some commentators are convinced the teaching is against the solemn and serious civil oaths that use the name of God, or His Word. If this be the case, then James has interspersed his teaching on the consistent speech of the Christian with a subject that seems to be "stuck in," or somewhat out of context.

Lest we be led astray on our consideration of the extent of the

prohibition, we should humbly concur that James is emphasizing the importance of telling the truth under all circumstances. A man may sometimes hold his own council, but he should never lie.

It is far better to make no reply to a question as Jesus did at His trial, than to make a false statement as Peter did at the same trial. The first can be altogether right, where the latter is always wrong. May God help us to be as constant in our word as is our Lord. May we never say yea when we know nay is the answer, nor nay when we know yea is the answer. Since our business is not deceit, but truth-telling, then common oaths and swearing need not be a part of our vocabulary.

FIVE THREE-POINT SERMON STARTERS

WHY BE PATIENT? 5:7-8

1. The Lord is coming 5:7a
2. We have the examples -
 - a. From the Scripture.
 - b. From the farmer.
3. Precious fruit comes later 5:7b

THE REWARDS OF IMPATIENCE 5:7-12

1. Murmuring against the brethren 5:9.
2. Miss the pity and mercy of the Lord 5:11.
3. The precious fruit of the merciful is lost 5:7b, 12b.

CHRISTIANS TELL THE TRUTH 5:12

1. No need to confirm his speech with oaths.
2. His reputation is worth more than the oath of the liar.
3. He is not under the condemnation of the liars.

THE JUDGE 5:7-12

1. He is the Lord Jesus Christ 5:7-8.
2. His judgment will come at any moment.
3. His judgment is to be feared 5:12b.

SWEAR NOT 5:12; Matt. 5:33-37

1. Avoid all oaths.
2. Avoid the appearances of evil in loose talk.
(Cheese, for Jesus; Gosh or Golly for God, etc)
3. Avoid the condemnation of God.