



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

OUR MISSION OF RECONCILIATION – JAMES 5:19-20

COLORADO

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We must always remember there is a God Who answers prayer and a faith that is real and genuine operates on the basis of prayer. James uses the prophet Elijah as an illustration of a man who prayed and calls us to be godly men and women of prayer as well. James will now conclude his letter by addressing one more important matter before the church as he stresses a believer's responsibility and mission of reconciliation, especially within the church.

I. OUR MISSION OF RECONCILIATION!-JAMES 5:19-20

James 5:19-20 "My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, (20) let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins."

What was James purpose in writing this book? His concluding verses make that clear. Throughout his letter, his primary objective has been to confront those in the church who do not have a real and genuine, saving faith in Jesus Christ. By their mouth they might profess to know Christ but their life sadly reveals a different story. James' deep concern is that no one would be deceived in any way about their salvation for in Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus clearly warns that while many will claim to know Him, not all possess a saving faith. And so James makes this last salvation appeal by calling believers to evangelize the unsaved even from among their midst, within the church.

A. "MY BRETHREN"– JAMES 5:19A

James calls upon his fellow members of the family of God within the church. He uses this expression of endearment, warmth, love and concern as he calls true and genuine believers to action; that of restoring the one in sin back to God. Thus James closes with a most significant task, emphasizing the eternally consequence and far reaching importance of this responsibility of accountability and reconciliation.

B. "IF ANY AMONG YOU" -JAMES 5:19B

James begins by identifying those who would be within their church body, a member of their group, "among you". His focus is on any among your group of believers.

C. "STRAYS FROM THE TRUTH" – JAMES 5:19C

James focus and final concern in these last verses is on those who have strayed from the truth. These are the ones who profess to be believers in the church and yet in reality have strayed from the truth.

"strayed" Greek *planao* "wander, go astray, to apostatize."

Frequently in the New Testament this word is used to refer to the condition of the unsaved. Matthew 22:29, 1 Peter 2:25 and Titus 3:3 are a few examples of such. And what have they strayed from? James says "the truth", referring to the truth of the Word of God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a truth that must be lived as well as believed. They have heard the truth, they profess to know the truth on the outside and yet their life bears no evidence of a true inward transformation. James isn't referring to the occasional sin that every believer can fall prey to, but rather the habitual lifestyle that gives evidence of no true salvation at all. James identifies those in the church who would profess Christ with their lips yet possess no true, genuine, saving faith. Remember his concern has been to reveal the realities of a living faith that is true and authentic. And here, he calls on all believers to have a genuine concern for those who are even in the church claiming to know Christ and yet their life gives evidence to the contrary. 1 Peter 2:25 talks about how we were "continually straying like sheep", before we were saved. And this is the concern James has as he closes his letter for those within the church, those who at least outwardly identify with the Christian community.

D. "AND ONE TURNS HIM BACK"- JAMES 5:19D

James sees the responsibility of calling sinners to repentance as a task and concern of all true believers. It must be our heart to restore and reconcile sinners to God. When James says, "turns him back", or in other translations, "one converts him", this word in the Greek, "epistrepho", is used frequently in the New Testament to speak of a sinner's conversion to Jesus Christ. In Acts 3:19 Peter urged his audience to "repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away." And in 1 Thessalonians 1:9 Paul commended these believers because they "turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God". James uses this word to speak of turning people from false belief to a genuine saving faith in Christ.¹ (See also Matthew 18:3; Luke 1:16-17; Acts 9:35; 14:15; 26:18-20; 2 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Peter 2:25)

E. "LET HIM KNOW THAT HE WHO TURNS A SINNER"- JAMES 5:20A

James exhorts this work of reconciliation by urging his readers to recognize its important results. He wants us to understand the critical and eternal results of such an action by true believers. And he wants us to understand that God uses true believers to participate in this ministry. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:18 that we were given the ministry of reconciliation. It is the responsibility of every believer. As we understand that those who reject Jesus Christ will incur a severe and eternal judgment. That must spur us on to evangelize the lost,

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especially those in our own midst in the church. Scripture refers to a “sinner” most often as one who is without Christ and in need of salvation. 1 John 2:19 refers to those who were not really a part of the true church even though they may appear to be. *“They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.”*

F. FROM THE ERROR OF HIS WAY – JAMES 5: 20B

James 5:19-20 “My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, (20) let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.”

James emphasizes the fact that the former course this one is on is in error and stands in contrast to God’s truth. Truth and error are mutually exclusive.² And turning away from, or out of his erring or wandering ways into the path of truth is the result of a genuine salvation.

G. “WILL SAVE HIS SOUL FROM DEATH” – JAMES 5: 20C

The way of sin will lead to an eternal death and separation from God. Understanding this terrible fate that awaits the unsaved must motivate us to call for repentance from those who stray from the truth. There is a terrible and eternal fate that awaits the unrepentant sinner. Eternal “souls” are at stake.

“soul” Greek **ψυχη** “the inner, immortal person, the whole person.”

The ultimate end of sin is death and that is not just a physical death but rather eternal separation from God. James 1:15 says that sin “brings forth death”. Paul wrote in Romans 6:23 that “the wages of sin is death”. And John wrote in Revelation 21:8 “But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” Those who do not possess a real and genuine faith, those who have chosen their way above God’s way are spoken of in Proverbs 14:12, “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”³

“save” Greek **σωζω** “rescue, to save, most common word in the New Testament used for salvation.”

Turning to God in repentance will result in salvation and that is where a true and genuine faith begins. So James cannot over emphasize the significance and great eternal outcome of one who is turned from the error of his way. He or she is rescued, saved from eternal death and hell.

H. “AND COVER A MULTITUDE OF SINS.” – JAMES 5: 20D

The second result of reconciliation is that it “covers a multitude of sins.” The Old Testament would refer to this not in terms of hiding sin but rather with the sense that forgiveness for those sins has been secured. In Psalm 32:1 David wrote “How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!” And Psalm 103:12 says that our sins have been removed as far as the east is from the west. Only Jesus Christ can forgive sins because His death on the cross atoned for our sins.

In every church there are those whose professions are not real and they do not possess a true and saving faith. Their true condition is desperate without a true relationship with Jesus Christ. Yes, only God can save and rescue one from sin, but He has given us the ministry of reconciliation. And James final words express the measure of the concern and effort we are to expend in our spiritual concern for those in spiritual need. Though we cannot convert them, we must labor to do so. Though we cannot save them from death, we must strive for their spiritual welfare as if their eternal destiny rested with us. Though we cannot cover their sins, we must follow the example of the Son of God and hold nothing dear to ourselves and no sacrifice too great if only they are saved. For the local church of which James speaks of is a fellowship of concern.⁴ And we must keep in mind the words from Proverbs 11:30, “And he who is wise winds souls.”

Remember, James speaks of a living faith throughout this letter. And he closes by reminding us that a living faith is vitally concerned for the welfare of others, especially those who are not of the household of God. Where do you stand?

¹MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary on James*. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg.289-290.

²Hiebert, D. Edmond, *James*. Moody Bible Institute: Chicago, Illinois, 1992. Pg. 309.

³MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary on James*. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg.288.

⁴Motyer, J.A., *The Message of James*. InterVarsity: Downers Grove, Illinois, 1985. Pg.204-214.