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As we come to James 5, we repeatedly read about troubles and prayer. The mature believer has learned to be prayerful in troubles. Rather than giving up, or depending on self-reliance, or turning to the world, the mature believer turns to God in prayer. God does use others at times to help us, but He is the source.

The chapter begins by addressing those that would use their wealth to oppress others. It is certainly not a sin to have plenty of money. Abraham was a wealthy man who walked with God and was used to bless the world. Job, who was the wealthiest "of all the men in the east", was blameless, upright and a man who feared God (*Job 1:1-3*).

But, the Bible puts boundaries on how wealth is to be acquired and treated. Acquiring and using one's wealth wrongfully is condemned and will be judged by God. It may have consequences in this earthly life, but certainly will be considered when God judges believers for rewards in heaven.

In the OT, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Amos were among prophets who warned that judgment was coming to those who lived for selfish luxuries and overindulgence while robbing or exploiting the poor. In James 5, James gives two illustrations of how the rich were wrongly gaining wealth and power: dishonest practice in business (by holding back wages) (v. 4) and corruption in politics (by controlling the courts) (v. 6).

At that time, laborers were often hired by the day with no legal contract with their employers (*exemplified in the parable of the laborers in Matthew 20:1-16*). In the law, God had given instructions to protect the laborers. "You shall not oppress a hired servant... you shall give him his wages on his day before the sun sets" (*Deut. 24:14-15*); "the wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning" (*Lev. 19:13*); "Woe to him that builds his house without righteousness... who uses his neighbor's service without pay and does not give him his wages" (*Jer. 22:13*).

"Thou shalt not steal" is the Eighth Commandment, and stealing can be accomplished in many ways. Whether we take what belongs to others, or hold back what others are owed, these are forms of stealing.

Another illustration of abusing one's wealth is political corruption. It is often true that those with greater wealth have excessive political power to get what they want. Their "golden rule" is "whoever has the gold makes the rules".

In the OT, God established in Israel a court system (*Deut. 17:8-13*). The judges were not to be greedy (*Ex. 18:21*), and they were to be fair and impartial (*Deut. 19:16-21*). The Bible often refers to corrupt politicians. The prophet Amos denounced corrupt judges in his day (*Amos 5:12-15*). In James' day, the courts were often easy to control by those who had enough money.

God owns all wealth (*Psalm 50:10*). We are allowed to be stewards of His wealth for His glory. Many Proverbs speak of the wisdom of proper wealth management with this principle in view.

Gaining wealth wrongly is sinful, and using wealth wrongly is sinful also. An example in v. 3 is how these people hoarded their wealth. We can say with Scriptural authority that there is nothing sinful about saving. "For children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children" (*2Cor 12:14*); "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (*1Timothy 5:8*). In Christ's parable of the talents, the master rewarded those who had taken his money and invested it well, for his glory.

But it is wrong to gain wealth by withholding from others to whom we owe (v. 3-4). It is wrong to live in selfish luxury and self-indulgence while being insensitive to the needs of others. There is a huge difference between enjoying what God has given us and living extravagantly while owing a debt to others.

Material riches will vanish someday. Those that find their ultimate security in wealth will be sadly and severely disappointed. And "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (*1 Tim 6:10*).

James 5

Rich Oppressors Will Be Judged

5 Now listen, *you* rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon *you*! ²Your riches are ruined, and the moths have eaten your clothes. ³Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. ⁴Indeed the wages you failed to pay the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. ⁵You have lived on the earth in pleasure and self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. ⁶You have condemned and murdered righteous men who offered no resistance to you.

Be Patient and Persevering

⁷Therefore 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 rains. ⁸You also be patient. Stand firm and strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

⁹Do not complain against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! ¹⁰My brethren, as an example of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹Indeed, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and have seen the outcome *intended* by the Lord, that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

¹²But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath. But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and *your* "No," "No," or you will be condemned.

Meeting Specific Needs

¹³Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. ¹⁴Is 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. ¹⁵And 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. ¹⁶Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. ¹⁷Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. ¹⁸And he prayed again, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

Bring Back the Erring One

¹⁹Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone should bring him back, ²⁰remember this, 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.

Memory Verse

*"The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil"
(1 Timothy 6:10)*