

JAMES: PRACTICING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

XI. Heeding God In The Vulnerable Role

(James 5:7-12)

I. Introduction

- A. Though the Epistle of James offers little formal structure and is less concerned about theological concepts than other New Testament works, it is intensely practical, explaining how to be "doers" of God's Word, James 1:22.
- B. James 5:7-12 addresses slaves, hired hands or others who are in roles that leave them vulnerable to being oppressed by more powerful or influential parties, so we view the passage for our insight and application:

II. Heeding God In The Vulnerable Role, James 5:7-12.

- A. Having addressed self-employed believers in James 4:13-17 and then wealthy believers who employed others in James 5:1-6, James wrote to believers who functioned in roles that were typically more vulnerable to being oppressed by more powerful parties in James 5:7-12.
- B. He directed them to a "patient holding out under trial" (*makrothumeo*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 489; Richard C. Trench, Syns. of the N. T., 1973, p. 196) unto the coming of Christ, James 5:7a. They were to have a long-term approach like the farmer who cannot by briefly looking at his crops see them grow, but over the long-term he notices that they develop with the early (October-November) and the latter (April-May) rains in the Hebrew calendar, James 5:7b. (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to James 5:7)
- C. Believers vulnerable to being oppressed were thus to be patient in holding out under trial (*makrothumeo* again, U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 788) and so to "confirm, strengthen" (*sterizo*, *Ibid.*, Arndt & Gingrich, p. 775) their hearts, the inner man, for the coming of the Lord was near, James 5:8.
- D. Such believers were not to "complain" (*stenazo*, *Ibid.*, p. 773) about one another lest they be condemned, for the Judge, Jesus, is about to appear, and we must not want Him to condemn us for complaining about others, James 5:9! This order does not mean we cannot make judgments about others, for Matthew 7:1-5 calls us to make such judgments after we have judged ourselves, but it *does* call us not to pass judgment with malice!
- E. To illustrate, James referred to the Old Testament prophets who spoke in the Lord's name, facing persecution for doing so while being "patient in holding out under trial" (*makrothumia* again, *Ibid.*, U. B. S. Grk. N. T., p. 789), James 5:10. We believers today consider those prophets blessed ("happy or fortunate," *makarizomen*, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 833) who thus endured such mistreatment, James 5:11a. (cf. Matthew 5:11-12)
- F. James' readers had also heard of the patience of Old Testament Job who had lost all of his possessions, his servants, his children and his health coupled with his wife's discouraging call to curse God and die while Job faced trials from Satan (cf. Job 1:1-2:10) only to have God eventually restore all these losses (Job 42:7-17), revealing the Lord is very compassionate and merciful, James 5:11b ESV.
- G. Above all things, James directed his readers not to make flippant, profane or blasphemous oaths out of frustration or anger while under trials from oppressors, but to let their words be what was exactly true, their "yes" meaning "yes" and their "no" meaning "no," James 5:12a; *Ibid.*, Ryrie, ftn. to James 5:12. Anything less than strict control of one's speech under trial would bring one under God's condemnation for sin, James 5:12b.

Lesson: *Believers in roles that are vulnerable to oppressors face the temptation of reacting in sinful outbursts of anger to the injustices they face, but such sin is to be overcome. Rather, such believers must patiently hold out under trial, taking the long-term approach in waiting for the coming of the Lord to deal with the injustices. They must strengthen their hearts in such patience, not complaining about their oppressors lest God condemn them of sin. Old Testament prophets and Job were examples to follow of such patient endurance, with the realization that God will bless us as He has blessed them. Above all, believers suffering injustices must watch that their speech be strictly controlled, that they not take flippant, profane or blasphemous oaths in frustration or outbursts of anger, but watch that their "yes" mean "yes" and their "no" mean "no" in self-control lest the Lord punish them.*

Application: *(1) If we find ourselves in the difficult calling in life where we are assigned the role of being vulnerable to oppression, instead of retaliating when wronged, we must look to God to address the wrong, even if we must wait until Christ handles it at the rapture! (2) The reward for such holding out under duress is great seen in the reward God provided for His Old Testament prophets and Job who endured such afflictions (cf. Matthew 5:11-12), so may we recall the final reward from God for such righteous self-restraint under trial! (3) May we especially watch our speech under duress, that we not judge or speak rashly in foolishness, but use carefully controlled words for God's approval and blessing.*