

# Attitude of Humility

James 1:9-12

## Intro

In a series of articles on the nature of greed, Christian blogger Ted Scofield writes:

“When I ask people ‘What is greed?’ typically the first concept articulated involves the notion of abundance. Greed is when you have too much stuff (which only money can buy), or place too much importance on stuff, or spend too much time pursuing or wanting or envying stuff.”

The late comedian George Carlin stated it well when he said: "That's the whole meaning of life, isn't it? Trying to find a place for your stuff ... That's all your house is—a place to keep your stuff while you go out and get more stuff. Sometimes you've got to move, you've got to get a bigger house. Why? Too much stuff!"

Sure enough, we in North America are not filling our houses with people. In 1950, the average home size was 983 square feet and 3.37 people lived in it. By 2009, the average home's square footage has grown to 2,700 square feet with only 2.57 occupants. Folks we live in a very affluent society that places importance on stuff!

This is what James deals with in his passage of James 1:9-10. He writes about the poor and the rich and what attitude they should have in regard to their poor state and also to their wealthy state.

## Background to James 1:9-12

In this passage James is introducing a new theme. He writes about the contrast between the poor believer and the rich believer.

James addresses first the Jewish believers who were economically poor and who were the majority of the persecuted and scattered. Many of them at one time were financially wealthy but during the persecution (Acts 8:1) their homes and possessions were confiscated or they had to leave them behind. Therefore many of them were living in great need and poverty.

Despite their circumstance, James writes to them encouraging them to take pride in their high position. Let's look at James 1:9.

## The Poor

***“Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position.”*** (James 1:9)

Here, James is speaking of the believer who is economically poor and who represented most of the scattered and persecuted believers. James says that they should take pride or rejoice in their high position. What does James mean to boast of their high position? Their high position is their standing in Christ. In and through Christ we have riches that cannot be compared with this world.

In 2 Corinthians 8:9 Paul says, *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”* Also in Ephesians 1:18-19, *“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.”*

When anyone accepts Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour they are instantaneously enriched with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph. 1:3). In fact, the Apostle Paul refers to these blessings as *“the*

*unfathomable riches of Christ*” in Ephesians 3:8. “Unfathomable” means “unsearchable, not to be tracked out.” The idea is that the believer’s blessings in Christ are “too deep to be measured.”

James 2:5 says, *“Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?”*

Contrary to the prosperity gospel, James does not say that the poor are to claim material riches. The “name it and claim it” or “health and wealth” heresy which is a perversion of God’s Word that uses false promises to appeal to the greed of its victims.

James directs the poor man to glory in his high position, which refers to his spiritual wealth in Christ. When a poor person trusts in Christ as Saviour and Lord, they instantly become the heir of a vast eternal fortune. The person becomes a child of the King of kings, with access to all of the King’s resources. The Apostle Paul pictures the believer as seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). Paul repeatedly refers to the believer as being *“in Christ,”* which means that everything that is true of Christ is true of us.

Here are some of the riches we have in Christ:

**I AM ACCEPTED...**

John 1:12 I am God's child.

Romans 5:1 I have been justified (declared righteous).

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 I have been bought with a price and I belong to God.

Colossians 1:13-14 I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins.

Hebrews 4:14-16 I have direct access to the throne of God’s grace through Christ.

**I AM SECURE...**

Romans 8:1-2 I am free from condemnation.

Romans 8:31-39 I am free from any condemnation brought against me.

Philippians 3:20 I am a citizen of heaven.

2 Timothy 1:7 I have not been given a spirit of fear but of power, love and a sound mind.

1 John 5:18 I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me.

**I AM SIGNIFICANT...**

1 Corinthians 3:16 I am God's temple, His Spirit’s dwelling place.

Ephesians 2:6 I am seated with Jesus Christ in the heavenly realm.

Ephesians 3:12 I may approach God with freedom and confidence.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.

These my dear friends are only a few of the riches we have in Christ. I could be here for hours sharing with you the vast, unfathomable riches that a believer possesses in Christ.

The poor believers may be hungry, but they have the bread of life. They may be thirsty but they have the water of life. They may be poor but they have eternal riches. The believers may be rejected by the world but they have been eternally received by God! Amen!!

**The Rich**

***“But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower.”*** (James 1:10)

The rich man is tempted to glory in his wealth and the status and power that come from financial success. James tells the rich to glory, rather, in their humiliation as a believer. Their wealth does not put them on a higher spiritual plain than the poor believer. Their wealth pertains only to this fleeting life.

They, with their riches will soon fade away. As someone has said, *“When the game is over, the king and the pawn goes back into the same box.”* The rich person’s house, property holdings, and stock portfolio will mean nothing when they are in the grave. So the rich person must not follow the world by glorying in their riches, but rather to glory in their humiliation.

The great disadvantage of riches is that they tend to give the rich person a sense of **false security**. The affluent person feels that they are safe, comfortable and feels that their resources are enough to buy themselves out of any circumstances that they face or wish to avoid.

The attitude of both the poor and the rich brother is the result of the spiritual wisdom each has attained. The results look in opposite directions. As the poor brother forgets all his earthly poverty, so the rich brother forgets all his earthly riches. By faith in Christ the two are equals. The rich brother has come to realize that at the cross he stands on the same level as with the poor brother. Both have been given a new status in Christ, and it is their true ground for taking pride.

Folks! I glory not in the things of this world BUT I glory in the riches that I have in Christ!

James states a reason for the command to the rich brother when he gives the illustration from the fate of the wild flower (verse 11a), and applies it to the end of the rich.

***“Since they will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.”*** (James 1:10b-11)

James gives the rich person an illustration from the wild flower. The flowering grass speaks of the brevity and uncertainty of life (1 Peter 1:24). Obviously this statement would apply to the life of the poor believer but here James’ focus is to awaken the conscience of the rich believer, who because he has "plenty" of earth's riches, he is prone to forget that these are passing riches and can never be the basis for one's eternal security.

Also James speaks of life as a transitory vapour. In James 4:14 we read, *“Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.”*

The point that James is making is that life is so uncertain and we are all vulnerable. Trials, difficulties and disasters may come any moment without expectation. Since this is possible, a person is a fool to put all his or her trust in things such as riches and wealth - which they may lose at any moment. One is only wise if they put their trust in things which one cannot lose, the eternal.

Therefore James is telling the rich to stop putting their trust in their own power and wealth. He urges them to trust God, who can give them the things which last for ever.

### **The Reward**

***Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.*** (James 1:12)

The one who perseveres never relinquishes their trust in the Lord because they have withstood the test. Perseverance brings God's approval and His approval brings the crown of life – which is the reward of eternal life. This folks is our ultimate **“high position!”**

The greatest honour, and the greatest privilege that an individual can receive and experience is when our Lord says, *“Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master”* (Matt. 25:21).

### **Conclusion**

We all have trials that God allows us to go through to test our faith. We live in a very broken world and trials are inevitable. It will not help us to compare ourselves to others. It is tempting at times to believe that our trials are so much worse than they are.

I appreciate this teaching from James because I know that I tend to make comparisons. I can dwell on being envious of others who are well off that I think they do not suffer as I do. Sometimes we can look at the rich and think that their resources are enough to buy themselves out of any circumstances that they face or wish to avoid. That folks is a bad attitude and which James rebukes.

What James teaches here is that the poor believer forgets all his earthly poverty, and the rich believer forgets all his earthly riches. By faith in Christ the two are equals. The rich brother has come to realize that at the cross he stands on the same level as with the poor brother.

Also I am tempted to grumble that God is allowing unwanted trials to come my way. Or, I can see someone who is going through a horrible time and I fear that I may end up there or I am relieved that "at least I am not dealing with the unfortunate circumstances that the other is going through..."

The good news that James wants us to take a hold of is that God can be God to all of us in the middle of whatever we go through. There is no pit lower than God's presence can reach. He does not allow us to be tempted or tested beyond what we can bear but provides a way out (1 Cor. 10:13). God does not allow us to go through anything that He cannot redeem and heal and eventually use to bring us to a fullness in Him.

In the end I want to say: **“I glory not in the things of this world BUT I glory in the riches that I have in Christ!”**