

Faith that Works

Faith
AD 48-62
Prayer

General Epistle of James

Riches
Tongue
Pride

Lesson 7

PASTOR NORMAN RUSH, JR



The General Epistles of the New Testament

Lesson 7

The Book of James

Lesson 7

- VII. Practical religion and business affairs: 4:13–5:6
 - A. Warning About Self-Confidence: 4:13-17
 - B. Warning to the Rich: 5:1-6

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

- A. Warning Against Judging Others: 4:13-17: “Look here, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit.” How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it’s here a little while, then it’s gone. What you ought to say is, “If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that.” Otherwise, you are boasting about your own pretentious plans, and all such boasting is evil. Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.”

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

In these verses James addresses the self-confident traveling traders or itinerant merchants, likely Jews, who his readers would be familiar with.

They depended on personal assertiveness as a solution to their poverty and low social status.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

v. 13 - “Look here, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit.”

These merchants are making their plans for their immediate future and they express that their confidence that their future is in their own hands.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs: 4:13-5:6

They determine the following:

- 1) The day of their departure: today or tomorrow,
- 2) The city they will visit: to a certain town,
- 3) The time the journey will take and the length of their proposed stay: a year,
- 4) The business they plan to conduct,
- 5) The profit they assume they will make.

In all of these matters, they take it for granted that they are the only ones that are concerned with their business and no one else.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

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This is a presumptuous confidence about their future. Proverbs 27:1 says – “Don’t brag about tomorrow, since you don’t know what the day will bring.” James may have had this verse in mind when he wrote this verse 13. This verse also forms the theme of one the most satirical of Jesus’s parables – the Rich Fool, who is making his plans for his future security but forgot that the length of his life was something he did not have the power to determine, and who found out to his dismay that the moment when those plans seemed complete was the precise moment when he would no longer be there to benefit from them, Luke 12:16-21.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs: 4:13-5:6

James urges greater recognition of God's providence and warns against arrogantly planning events which one cannot really control.

A clear characteristic of having an affair with worldliness is making plans without consulting God.

Such action is boasting, that is, a presumption that oneself, not God, is in control of the circumstances of live.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

v. 14 – “How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it’s here a little while, then it’s gone.”

James points out via a question, that these merchants are forgetting they are human and no more. They are not prophets endowed with power to foretell what God would have men to know about the future.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

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In other words, they are ignorant of what the future holds. They also fail to recognize their frailty and the short duration of their lives.

James challenges them with this statement: “Your life is like the morning fog – it is here a little while, then it’s gone.” They think their life is secure, that their life will stand against circumstances.

But in fact, it is only a vapor or like the morning fog – it is here for a little while and then it is gone.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

The only thing that is certain about life, is that it will end sooner or later in death, and the refusal to face up to the inevitableness of death or the failure to remember that it may come at a time that is unexpected or in a way not foreseen, is a sign of human arrogance.

James uses the consideration of the uncertainty of our life's length or of life's duration to call his readers to a greater sense of their absolute dependence on Almighty God.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

v. 15 – “What you ought to say is, “If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that.” Notice the words that they “ought to say” are connected with “you who say” in verse 13.

What men and women ought to be saying in their hearts and utter with their lips is “if the Lord wants us to,” Life itself and what we do with it depend on God’s will. We must recognize God (Divine Providence)! We are dependent on God for life itself.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

Paul was very conscious of the reality of providence (God's Will). He frequently wrote that he recognized and valued God's will as he looked toward the future:

- 1) When he said farewell to the Christians at Ephesus, he said, **"I will return again unto you, if God will"**, Acts 18:21.
- 2) His decision to visit the Corinthians in the near future is qualified by the provisos **'if the Lord will'** and **'if the Lord permit'**, 1 Corinthians 4:19 & 16:7.
- 3) Paul 'trusts in the Lord Jesus' that he will be able to send Timothy to the Philippians, and that he himself will also be able to pay them a visit, Philippians 2:19, 24.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

There is a danger of using the expression “God willing” so often that it becomes just a phrase and devoid of religious content.

Yet, Christians today do not give sufficient thought and expression of their (our) utter dependence on the will of God. Why do we not depend on the will of God? Is it because we are being hypocritical or because we fail to acknowledge and value the supremacy of God?

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

v. 16 – “Otherwise you are boasting about your own pretentious plans, and all such boasting is evil.”

“Otherwise” or as the KJV “But now” indicates that James continues to say to the proud traders he has been describing that they actually rejoice in your boastings. In other words, their arrogant speeches are expressions of self-glorification and of the joy they find in imagining they have power to control their own destiny. The word translated “boasting” – *alazoniais* – suggests the thought that these people are wandering in an unreal world of speculation and boasting to others about what they think they have found there!

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

The word is found once again in the New Testament, in the expression 'the pride of life' – see 1 Jn. 2:16. “All such boasting is evil” – other rejoicings and gloryings may be legitimate but this kind of boasting can be described only as evil.

These verses point out that a clear characteristic of having an affair with worldliness is making plans without consulting God. Such action is boasting, that is a presumption that oneself, not God, is in control of the circumstances of life.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

v. 17 – “Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.” James sums up this section with a maxim which has wider inferences for Christians than that which is drawn from it in this particular context. What he has written in the preceding verses he wishes his readers to regard mainly as a warning against presumptuous self-confidence, and as a reminder of their duty ‘to walk humbly with their God.’ This kind of humility is a divine requirement, Micah 6:8, and to know of this requirement but in practice to ignore it constitutes in itself sin.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

The only specific definition of sin in the New Testament is found in 1 John 3:4 – “Everyone who sins is breaking God’s law, for all sin is contrary to the law of God.” This can imply either that sin is the transgression of the law or that sin is a failure to do what the law demands. Either sins of commission or sins of omission. It the latter that James expresses in verse 17 – the maxim – “Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.” James’ teaching here is in keeping with the teaching of Jesus, especially, contained in His parables, where emphasis is placed on the sinfulness not so much of positive wrongdoing but rather as of a failure to do right.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

Often, Jesus's censure/correction fell on sins of omission:

- 1) In the parable of the talents, the man who received the one talent is strongly condemned, not because he had done any definite wrong, but because he had buried a precious gift, treating it as a dead and ugly thing, when in fact it was something living and capable of being productive. He had not used it for any evil purpose, but he had not done any good with it.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

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- 2) In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the priest and Levite are mentioned with obvious contempt not because they had violated any commandment, but because they were so preoccupied with their church business that they failed to respond to the call of human need. They were not guilty of any direct breach of the law but had missed the opportunity of doing good by showing mercy to one who needed it.

Practical religion & business affairs: 4:13-5:6

- 3) In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man finds himself in torment in life beyond the grave, not because he has been rich, but because he had yielded to the temptation, which especially hits the wealthy, to use his wealth to screen/protect himself from any personal contact with those who he found unlike himself, or who lived in circumstances more humble than his own. As a result, he failed to recognize and use opportunities of service to help those at his very doorstep. He created a gulf between Lazarus and himself, and that gulf remained fixed after they were parted by death.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

- 4) In the parable of the last judgment, found in Matthew 25:31-46, which closes Jesus' teaching in the Gospel – we should not forget that all nations of the world are pictured as standing before the throne of the great Judge, who proceeds to divide them into two distinct classes even as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats. The dividing line is not drawn between those who have committed certain sinful acts, but rather between those who have shown charity (love) to their fellow men, and in that service have almost unconsciously been serving the Lord, and those who had failed to do so. In this scene of the judgment, there is no mention or reference to any sins of commission, but the sins of omission only are mentioned.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

The one vital question of our Lord, is did you in the course of your earthly pilgrimage show love to the least of My brethren; or were you so self-centered, so wrapped up in your own concerns and in the pursuit of your own ambitions, so blind to the needs of others, that you never noticed the opportunities of doing good that were presented to you?

It will be no use pleading with excuses for the failure to love, as verse 25:45 says “I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.”

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

All of us who profess Christ and call ourselves Christians should be examining ourselves not just with reference to the positive wrong we may have done, but also to our failure to express our discipleship in terms of service to our fellow man. It is probably true to say that we more often leave undone the things we ought to have done than do the things we ought not to have done. As verse 17, says
“Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.”

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

B. Warning to the Rich: 5:1-6: “Look here, you rich people: Weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you. Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags. Your gold and silver have become worthless. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh like fine. This treasure you have accumulated will stand as evidence against you on the day of judgment. For listen! Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay. The wages you held back cry out against you.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

In summary, these verses show that when a rich person appears at the judgment of God, dishonestly gained wealth will not protect, but will attack.

v. 1 - “Look here, you rich people: Weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you.”

We know from chapter 1:10, that James was aware of rich men who professed the Christian faith, and that some of them may have been oppressing their less well-to-do brothers.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

In this passage, 5:1-6, it appears that James is writing more generally, lifting up a warning to all Christians who may be tempted to worldliness, the divine judgment that awaits those who, in one way or another, misuse the gift of wealth. Neither here nor anywhere in the New Testament are the rich denounced merely for being rich, but rather for yielding so readily to the temptations to which the rich are especially prone.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

Invariably, a false sense of security and an insatiable love of power accompany great wealth. As the saying goes, “all power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

Jesus in His teachings on this subject emphasized the self-satisfaction that so often results from accumulation of wealth, and He said, **“Woe unto you that are rich! For ye have received your consolation”** – Luke 6:24; and He told His disciples that it was very difficult for those who had great riches to enter the kingdom of God.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

He did not say it was impossible, for that would limit the divine power. James, on the other hand, stresses the certainty of the retribution that awaits those whose wealth has led them to sin.

As in chapter 4:13, James grabs the reader's attention with the words, 'Look Here,' James then calls the rich men to shed tears, but not tears of repentance but of anguish. Assuming their unrepentance, he announces the inevitable doom that confronts them.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

The lesson that James wants believers to learn is the folly of setting high value on wealth, or envying those who have it, or of working feverishly to obtain it. Because the rich are nearly always self-deceived, by thinking that their present prosperity will be permanent, James warns them that **'troubles'** are coming upon them.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

Often the rich think that they are immune from sorrows and hardships because of their wealth, James says they should weep and groan at the severity of the divine judgment that will fall upon them. The judgment has not arrived yet, but it is certain and predetermined that James in prophetic manner, speaks of it almost as if it were a present reality, because in the original language the literal meaning is that these troubles are now in the process of coming upon them.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

v. 2 – “Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags.” The Greek verbs ‘rotting’ and ‘moth-eaten’ are in the perfect tense, but some scholars regard this as a prophetic perfect and assume the reference is the fate which will sooner or later overtake all material possessions. However, it is more natural to show that what is described has actually taken place. James draws attention first, as an observed fact, to the insatiable greed which leads to hoarding.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

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Some rich men in their eagerness to get more and more goods and wealth have blinded themselves to the obvious fact that such goods/wealth, if not used, do and will deteriorate. It is clear from the verb for rotting that it refers to perishable products (in that day such as corn or oil). Clothes (Garments) were one of the chief forms of wealth in the ancient world, used as a means of payment, given as presents, or handed down as heirlooms.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

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This form of wealth is often mentioned in the Bible side by side with silver and gold. Read Acts 20:33 – “I have never coveted anyone’s silver or gold or fine clothes.” The rich hoarders that James has in mind, would rather that their surplus garments be eaten by what the Psalmist called the moth in Ps. 39:11 – “When you discipline us for our sins, you consume like a moth what is precious to us. Each of us is but a breath,” rather than become the possession of someone else.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

v. 3 – “Your gold and silver have become worthless. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh like fine. This treasure you have accumulated will stand as evidence against you on the day of judgment.”

James continues to address the rich hoarders and their allowing valuable things to perish by the neglect mentioned in verse 2. James says this is sin! God has provided the gold, silver, and clothes to help them and us. James warns the rich that the wealth they are counting on will be a witness against them, like ‘adding fuel to the fire of divine judgment.’

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

Not only is the wealth rotting and lost (possessions), but these possessions will bring the downfall of the possessors. James, here is pointing out the same truth that is expressed by Paul in Romans 2:5 – “But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself. For a day of anger is coming when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.”

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

As Tyndale New Testament Commentary states:

“The rich men’s accumulated wealth becomes in effect a treasury of divine wrath from which God will draw from on the day of judgment.”

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

v. 4 – “For listen! Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay. The wages you held back cry out against you. The cries of those who harvest your fields have reached the ears of the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.”

The inordinate desire of gaining and possessing wealth - the insatiable desire to gain takes more than one form.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

In the verse, James draws attention to what is the most inhuman of all its manifestations – the withholding from the laborer the payment that is due them. In the Law of Moses, the divine prohibition of the offense is clear and specific – “Never take advantage of poor and destitute laborers, whether they are fellow Israelites or foreigners living in your towns. You must pay them their wages each day before sunset because they are poor and are counting on it. If you don’t, they might cry out to the Lord against you, and it would be counted against you as sin.” Deuteronomy 24:14-15 NLT.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

The certainty of divine judgment/punishment that must be given on this horrible example of man's inhumanity to man is very clearly stated in Malachi 3:5 "At that time I will put you on trial. I am eager to witness against all sorcerers and adulterers and liars. I will speak against those who cheat employees of their wages, who oppress widows and orphans, or who deprive the foreigners living among you of justice, for these people do not fear me," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies."

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

No sin will escape God's notice, the cry of the laborer cries out for vengeance. Look at what the Bible says of Abel's blood crying out, Gen. 4:10 or the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah crying out because of the grievous sins that had been perpetrated within them, so the money that remains in the rich coffers instead of being distributed in wages for the service rendered.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

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The cries of the afflicted are heard by the Lord of Heaven's Armies. These cries are most definitely heard and acted on by the Lord. This speaks of the Lord's sovereign omnipotence. The use of the expression emphasizes the truth, that, though the poor and the oppressed appear to have no champions on earth, they have as their helper and avenger none other than the Lord God omnipotent!

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

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v. 5- “You have spent your years on earth in luxury, satisfying your every desire. You have fattened yourselves for the day of slaughter.”

In this verse we see another vicious trait or characteristic of the rich: Luxury and extravagance. The Greek word for luxury – suggests a life of luxury, weakness (in men), and self-indulgence.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

This kind of luxury is sternly denounced in the Bible as seen in Amos 6:1-7 – “What sorrow awaits you who lounge in luxury in Jerusalem, and you who feel secure in Samaria! You are famous and popular in Israel, and people go to you for help. But go over to Calneh and see what happened there. Then go to the great city of Hamath and down to the Philistine city of Gath. You are no better than they were and look at how they were destroyed.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

You push away every thought of coming disaster, but your actions only bring the day of judgment closer. How terrible for you who sprawl on ivory beds and lounge on your couches, eating the meat of tender lambs from the flock and of choice calves fattened in the stall. You sing trivial songs to the sound of the harp and fancy yourselves to be great musicians like David. You drink wine by the bowlful and perfume yourselves with fragrant lotions. You care nothing about the ruin of your nation. Therefore, you will be the first to be led away as captives. Suddenly, all your parties will end."

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

The pleasure that is discussed in this verse suggests extravagance and waste. James uses language of animals that are fattened for use in sacrifices, and the animals are unaware that they are being made ready for slaughter. They fill their lives with every form of pleasure, yet they are unconscious of the fact that they are headed for divine judgment.

VII. Practical religion & business affairs:

4:13-5:6

v. 6 – “You have condemned and killed innocent people, who do not resist you.”

The last trait or evil that James mentions in this denunciation of the rich is their oppression, even unto death, of the righteous, who are too weak to resist them. The unjust rich controlled the courts through bribery or other forms of injustice, and their exploitation of the poor often has.

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AD 48-62

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