

The General Epistles of the New Testament
Pastor Norman Rush
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Lesson 8

- VIII. Final Appeals: 5:7-20
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- VIII. Final Appeals: 5:7-20
 A. For Patience: 5:7-11 - “Dear brothers and sisters, be patient as you wait for the Lord’s return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They eagerly look for the valuable harvest to ripen. You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near.
 Don’t grumble about each other, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. For look – the Judge is standing at the door!
 For examples of patience in suffering, dear brothers and sisters, look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. We give great honor to those who endure under suffering. For instance, you know about Job, a man of great endurance. You can see how the Lord was kind to him at the end, for the Lord is full of tenderness and mercy.”

In this verse James addresses the age-old question why the righteous suffer, and he reminds us that there are times in which we can do little except “be patient” and determine not to give up – see Romans 8:18-25. This does not mean we do not resist the destructive ploys of the Devil. However, ultimately God is sovereign and sometimes chooses not to relieve our suffering until the second coming of Christ.

v. 7 – “Dear brothers and sisters, be patient as you wait for the Lord’s return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They eagerly look for the valuable harvest to ripen.” James now proceeds to exhort his Christian readers not to lose patience if the Day of Judgment upon the oppressors is long delayed. The day when they – the oppressed – will be delivered from all the wrongs they have unjustly suffered, and their oppressors sentenced to punishment

they deserve. The temptation to lose patience could lead those who yield to it – to the sins which ‘impatience’ so easily leads:

vindictiveness and despair. Thus, the words of James in this verse are so significant: **“Dear brothers and sister, be patient as you wait for the Lord’s return.”**

The Greek verb used here for ‘be patients’ is ‘Makrothumesate’, which is usually translated ‘long-suffering’ denotes not so much the brave endurance of afflictions and the refusal to give way or give up before them under pressure, as to the self-restraint which enables the sufferer to refrain from hasty retaliation. The opposites of ‘patience’ is wrath and revenge.

God is patient because He is ‘slow to anger’ and ‘of great kindness,’ and does not speedily inflict transgressors the full punishment they deserve. Nor does He, in executing judgment and assessing penalties, apply the letter of the law with all the strictness of an over-scrupulous judge. God recognizes, as the best human judges recognize, that sometimes circumstances alter cases; and He give the offender plenty of time to repent. God is long-suffering towards them, though a time will come when His patience is exhausted and the final day of His wrath must come upon the unrepentant sinner.

If the all-holy God, who is faced with the enormity of human sin, is patient, so too, James says, we the Christian must be patient in the face of the injustices of human life. Our patience must be extended both to God and to our fellow men. We must not be impatient with God for failing to avenge His faithful people immediately; nor must we attempt to act or assume the role of judge. Our ability to exercise patience is only available for us as far as we submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit, for a fruit of the Holy Spirit in long-suffering, Gal. 5:22.

The Greek word for “coming” or “return” is “Parousia” and is also used by Peter, Paul, John and by Jesus Himself with reference to His appearing in glory. The literal meaning of the word is ‘presence.’ By using this word in the New Testament for the second coming of Christ, that second coming is contrasted with His first coming.

As the babe of Bethlehem, the carpenter of Nazareth, the Son of Man with nowhere to lay His head, despised and reject of men, Christ came ‘incognito.’ It was only veiled in flesh that His Godhead could be seen during His earthly life, and then only with the eyes of faith.

But His appearance on the clouds of heaven will be such that He will be clear, distinct, obvious and unmistakable, without any possibility of doubt, as the Judge of mankind, as the Lord from Heaven, who will

gather His people together and summon those already living in union with Him to be with Him forever and shared with Him His eternal glory. We as Christians, are living between these two comings of the Lord, and we look back to the first and forward to the second for inspiration during as walk in the Lord on this earth. So, we must run this race of faith with patience looking to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who endured the cross despising the shame, Heb. 12:1,2.

When we are tempted to become angry in the face of unjust persecution, we must look forward to the 'parousia' or 'coming' of the Lord and see how futile, unworthy, and how ineffective our own attempts at vindicating our rights in view of the certain return of Christ, who has the power to execute true and righteous judgment.

James illustrates 'patience' with the example of the farmer who waits for the rains in the fall and the spring and for the harvest to ripen. The time between seedtime and the harvest was approximately four months, not a very long period, but one filled with anxiety in a country that was utterly dependent on the early and latter rains. The first rain was due soon after the sowing of the seed and the second when the crop was ripening. The faithful Jew, knew that God would be true to His promise that if His people kept His commandments, He would give them 'the first rain and the latter rain' – Deut. 11:14. The prophet Joel, in 2:23, told the children of Zion to be glad and rejoice in the Lord because He caused to come down for them 'the former and the latter rain.'

So, the farmer's patience for or over his land was more in the nature of confident expectancy. His faith in the reliability of God functioned as a restraining and controlling influence during what might otherwise have been a time of acute anxiety.

In the same way, the faithful Christian knows that Christ will be true to His promise to come again to His people and the Christian's patience is firmly grounded on the certainty of his faith.

v. 8 - **"You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near."** We, as Christians, are not to be worried about the number of years that may pass before the Coming of the Lord! We are called on to take courage, to strengthen, our heart in the assurance that the Lord's return will bring us complete spiritual health, fulfill our salvation and give us eternal life. We should live completely under the influence of the Second Coming of Christ. That we are to occupy until He comes, but live knowing His coming is in but a short time. In other words, if the Lord's return seems to be delayed, or if we relegate it to such a remote

time in the future that it has no effect on our outlook or our way of living, it is clear that His coming has ceased to be our 'living' hope. We have lost 'the confident expectation' of His return. We may have allowed 'skepticism' to whittle away our expectation of His return thus also gradually transform our Christian values to the point of little or no influence in our lives. We must be patient and take courage!!

v. 9 – “Don’t grumble about each other, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. For look – the Judge is standing at the door!” During the period of waiting for the Lord’s return, especially in the days of persecution and trial, Christians are tempted to blame one another for the miseries of their present situation or circumstances. This is the temptation that James has in mind when he says, “don’t grumble about each other, brothers and sisters.” The Greek word for grumble is ‘Stenazete’ which implies complaining, groaning, murmuring, or grumbling. Christians might groan or complain or grumble under individual suffering. We are not impervious to suffering or pain, but we are not to groan or complain against each other. That is useless and sinful and brings the risk of condemnation. The ‘judge’ alone has the complete knowledge of every human thought, word, and action, and He alone is free from partiality. And He is standing at the door! That means His foot is on the doorstep, and no human can stop His entrance. This then is a warning and a consolation to us.

v. 10 – “For examples of patience in suffering, dear brothers and sisters, look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.” In this verse, James shows that affliction has always been a part of the believer’s experience, and that affliction calls forth for their patience and long-suffering, and he reminds us through the example of the prophets. Jesus told us in Matthew 5:11-12 – “God blesses you when people mock you, persecute you, lie about you, and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.” Jesus reminds us of the certainty and privilege of suffering. James bids us to take the example of the suffering of affliction and patience of the prophets, for ourselves. Most all the prophets that we have any biographical or autobiographical information on in the Old Testament show that they are examples of suffering affliction in some way. However, it is likely that James has the prophet Jeremiah in mind when writing this verse. Jeremiah was called to deliver

a series of messages to his countrymen that were unpopular because they were pessimistic. Jeremiah, who was sympathetic to the suffering of others, was himself beaten, put in stocks, imprisoned in a dungeon, and thrown into a cistern, by them. His life was one of constant physical and spiritual suffering, yet his life is out of all the historical figures of the Old Testament that most foreshadowed Jesus Christ and His suffering of the physical and spiritual agony of the cross.

v. 11 – “We give great honor to those who endure under suffering. For instance, you know about Job, a man of great endurance. You can see how the Lord was kind to him at the end, for the Lord is full of tenderness and mercy.” Endurance or ‘constancy’ under suffering is an admirable quality and is regarded that way in the Bible. In Daniel 12:12, he wrote “and blessed are those who wait (endure)...” Jesus said in Matthew 5:10 – “God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.” Jesus warned us that we would be hated by all men for His name’s sake, but He also gave us words of encouragement and hope in Matthew 10:22 – “All nations will hate you because you are my followers. But everyone who endures to the end will be saved.” James agrees with Jesus’ words, when he says, “we give honor to those who endure...” The blessing of the Lord is the certain result of endurance, but it does not always accompany it. Notice that James uses the Greek word ‘hupomone’ for patience or endurance, is used in describing the virtue of Job. This is not the same word used for patience in the other verses of this passage. This word expresses more than patience – it expresses a determination to face a particular trial or a series of trials without flinching. Bible Scholar Hort, wrote that there is no English word quite strong enough to express the active courage and resolution implied here. ‘Constancy’ or ‘endurance’ comes the closest. What stands out about Job as an example of patience or endurance, is not his self-restraint under affliction that led him to be patient – because Job was far from showing patience in this sense with his so-called ‘friends or comforters.’ What Job did show, however, was a determination to endure whatever might befall him without losing faith in God. He believed in God even when he could not understand. Think about the blow after blow that came on him so rapidly. Look at three of Job’s responses:

1:21 – “He said, ‘I came naked from my mother’s womb, and I will be naked when I leave. The Lord gave me what I had, and the Lord has taken it away. Praise the name of the Lord!’”

2:10 – “But Job replied, ‘You talk like a foolish woman. Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad? So, in all this, Job said nothing wrong.’”

13:15 – “God might kill me, but I have no other hope. I am going to argue my case with him.” or in the KJV – “Though he slay me yet will I trust in him: But I will maintain mine own ways before him.”

The phrase “You can see how the Lord was kind to him at the end, for the Lord is full of tenderness and mercy” indicates the Lord’s complete vindication of Job. Not only were his material possessions, prosperity and family restored to him, but he was granted a fuller understanding of the purposes of God and His majesty and sovereignty. God who tested Job’s character through the furnace of affliction in the end showed Himself to be, in the word of the Psalmist quoted by James, in this verse, full of tenderness and mercy – Ps. 103:8.

- B. For Pure Speech: 5:12: “But most of all, my brothers, and sisters, never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned.”

Here, James is not suggesting that swearing is a worse offense than stealing, adultery, or murder. Neither is he speaking in hyperbole. What he means is that of all the manifestations of impatience in times of stress and affliction the most frequent is the taking of the Lord’s name in vain by the use of angry utterances and irreverent oaths. James is not saying all oaths are prohibited, but those using the name of God, or some substitute that are offered with levity and insincerity when people are impatient and abandon self-control. The words “by heaven or earth or anything else,” are equal to the words of Jesus in the sermon on the mount, when He was attacking the casualness of the Pharisees in allowing the use of frivolous oaths, like those taken by heaven, by earth, by Jerusalem, or one’s own head, on the ground that the name of God was not actually mentioned. The Pharisees said these oaths were of no account. Jesus says that it was impossible to differentiate in this subtle way between God and what belonged to God. The very use of subterfuge was in itself dishonoring to God. Therefore, Jesus prohibited altogether the use of oaths in ordinary conversations. Matthew 5:33-36 – “You have also heard that our ancestors were told, ‘You must not break your vows; you must carry out the vows you make to the Lord.’ But I say, do not make any vows! Do not say, ‘By heaven!’ because heaven is God’s throne. And do not say, ‘By the earth!’ because the earth is his footstool. And do not say, ‘By Jerusalem!’ for Jerusalem is the city of the great

King. Do not even say, 'By my head!' for you can't turn one hair white or black. Just say a simple, 'yes, I will,' or 'No, I won't.' Anything beyond this is from the evil one." The way to avoid swearing of this kind is by being strictly truthful in regular speech. Men should mean what they say and say what they mean. So, the teaching of Jesus and James are the same. All who use frivolous oaths are in danger of breaking the 3rd commandment – "You must not misuse the name of the Lord your God. The Lord will not let you go unpunished if you misuse his name."

Here is a good summary – originally, swearing was an attempt to involve the character and authority of God to support a claim or a promise, Lev. 19:12 and Deut. 23:23. Then, as often is the case today, the Lord's name was debased by using it to excessively emphasize a trivial point. James cites Jesus, insisting that we should have integrity in what we say, and that after a divine oath, failure to perform perfectly one's word besmirches God's holiness to those observing.

- C. For Prayer: 5:13-18: The Power of Prayer – in all circumstances - "Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven. Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years! Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops."

v. 13 – Rather than complain under trials or use frivolous oaths, Christians should turn to prayer, whatever the circumstances may be. Prayer is what differentiates us from other people. We know that our heavenly Father extends to us a standing invitation to draw near to Him. Nothing in our experiences, whether prosperity or adversity can cancel. "Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises." Notice James' use of a vivid rhetorical question, "are any of you suffering hardships?" Based on what James talked about in verse 10 of the numerous troubles and sufferings, the reader already knows that answer. When the Christian experiences hardships, he should turn to prayer, rather than self-pity! Remember when Jesus was in agony, wrestling with the forces of evil at the moment of their strongest attack (in the Garden on the Mount of Olives after the

Last Supper) that “He prayer more fervently, and he was in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood.”

Prayer may not remove the affliction or hardship, but it will most certainly transform it.

Life also has its times of happiness. The Greek word that James uses here – *euthumei* – is only used here and in the book of Acts. In Acts, Paul uses the word twice with both times in talking about outward trials and difficulty. In Acts 24:10 – Paul appears before Felix and says, “I know, sir, that you have been a judge of Jewish affairs for many years, so I *gladly* present my defense before you.” And again, in Acts 27:25, during his perilous voyage to Rome, after a long period of fasting, Paul tells his shipmates “So take *courage!* For I believe God. It will be just as he said.” The KJV says “be of good cheer.” Notice that Paul’s grounds for such a statement are based on the assurance of the Lord through supernatural means, that all the occupants of the ship will be saved and reach land safely, though the ship will be wrecked. Cheerfulness in adversity can be experienced and displayed by Christians. James, says, for the person to sing praises or psalms. The Greek word here is *psallo*, were we get the English word Psalm. James does not say we are to only sing the psalms of David, but in the broader sense, sing praises to God.

v. 14 – “Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord.” The initiative lies with the ‘sick’ person in sending ‘for the elders,’ who are officers of the church and whose faith the sick person is trusting to release healing. Their qualifications characterize them as men and women of personal uprightness and spiritual maturity, having special ability, particularly in the area of discernment. As elders, they hold positions of authority and presumably are people of faith and prayer. The ‘anointing...with oil’ does not refer to a medicinal act, or to a magic potion but is symbolic of the consecration of the sick person and the joyous presence of the Holy Spirit, in this case to bring healing in response to the obedience and faith of the elders. James stresses God’s power through prayer that accompanies the anointing.

v. 15 – “Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, your will be forgiven.” The “prayer offered in faith” in Greek is literally “the prayer of the faith,” referring to the gift of faith the Holy Spirit gives. Here the faith is granted to one or more of the elders to believe for the healing.

“**Make you well**” in this instance refers to physical restoration rather than to spiritual salvation. The healing of the “**sick**” person would indicate the forgiveness of any “**sins**” that may have been responsible for that particular illness. Not all sickness is caused by one’s sin, but in some cases, there is a connection. If God should effect a miraculous cure in answer to the elder’s prayer of faith accompanied by anointing with oil in the name of the Lord, that would be a clear indication that any sins of the sufferer, which might have been responsible for this particular illness, were forgiven. It was the sight of the paralytic taking up his mat and walking that provided unmistakable evidence that his sins, which had clearly resulted in his affliction, really had been forgiven. The New Testament does not teach that all physical suffering is due to the sins of the sufferer concerned, but that sometimes this is so recognized by both Jesus and Paul. See Mark 2:5-11 & 1 Cor. 11:30.

Mark 2:5-11 – “**Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, ‘My child your sins are forgiven.’ But some of the teachers of religious law who were sitting there thought to themselves, ‘What is he saying? This is blasphemy! Only God can forgive sins!’ Jesus knew immediately what they were thinking, so he asked the, ‘Why do you question this in your hearts? Is it easier to say to the paralyzed man ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk’? So I will prove to you that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins.’ Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said, ‘Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!’**”

1 Cor. 11:30 – “**That is why many of you are weak and sick and some have even died.**”

v. 16 – “**Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.**” Having spoken of the place or prayer in regard to sickness, vv. 13-15, James offers a summarizing inference which illustrates the power of prayer. The ‘sins’ James particularly has in mind may be those of the sick person, which could have been the root of his sickness, or they may be those of believers in general. Regardless, he does not enjoin a general public confession of all sins without any discretion whatever. Certainly, public wrongdoings that have tainted the whole church should be confessed before the church, but James especially refers to confessing sins to the individuals injured by them, Matt. 5:23-24. There is also a place for confidential confession to godly intercessors who will offer prevailing prayer for the offender

and provide wise counsel to him. James stresses the effectual nature of the earnest prayer of a righteous person. Although a literal translation of the Greek phrase is awkward, and different versions vary in their translations, the basic idea is that of a supplication “having energy.” Effective prayer is characterized by earnestness, fervency, and energy to release results and is illustrated in the case study the following verses provide.

v. 17 – “Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years!”

James uses Elijah as the only example of the earnest prayer of a righteous person. Elijah, in Jewish thought, became to be thought of as a prototype of the prophet who would immediately prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. It is as a second Elijah that John the Baptist is portrayed in the New Testament, see Mark 1:6 – “His clothes were woven from coarse camel hair and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey.” Jesus said of John the Baptist in Mark 9:13 – “But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they chose to abuse him, just as the Scriptures predicted.”

Elijah was the earliest of the great prophets of Israel and his name had become representative of the entire prophetic revelation, just as Moses was representative of the revelation of the sacred law. It is Moses and Elijah who are conversing with Jesus on the mount of Transfiguration, Mark 9:4 – “Then Elijah and Moses appeared and began talking with Jesus.” Though, to many in Israel, Elijah had attained a god-like status, James reminds us that Elijah was a man just like to the rest of us - “Elijah was as human as we are.” The Greek word used here means literally ‘suffering the same things,’ ‘Homoioopathes’ means inheriting the same nature, subject to the same emotions, and liable to the same weaknesses.

In spite of his greatness, Elijah was subject to the same feelings and liable to the same weaknesses we all experience. Effectual, that is, miracle-producing, prayer is not limited to a certain few, such as apostles or prophets. All believers can “pray for each other” v. 16 with the same results.

v. 18 – “Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops.” James reminds us again that the rains came as an answer to prayer. The Old Testament passage, 1 Kings 18:1 tells us “Later on, in the third year of the drought, the Lord said to

Elijah, ‘Go and present yourself to King Ahab. Tell him that I will soon send rain!’ Here, God tells Elijah that the end of the drought was soon coming. In verse 42 of the same chapter, it says that “...Elijah climbed to the top of Mount Carmel and bowed low to the ground and prayed with his face between his knees.”

- D. For Compassion: 5:19-20: “My dear brothers and sisters, if someone among you wanders away from the truth and is brought back, you can be sure that whoever brings the sinner back from wandering will save that person from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins.” James turns from a discussion of physical affliction to spiritual sickness, urging the restoration of backsliders, see Gal. 6:1 – “Dear Brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself.”

The expression ‘among you’ suggests that the erring one is a member of the church. In addition, the phrase ‘brought back’ is not necessarily limited to the original turning from sin to God, but to the subsequent experience of returning to God after a Christian has become involved in sin. A person may wander ‘from the truth’ of the Good News, in either belief or conduct or both. Whether doctrinal or moral the straying is a serious departure from the Christian way of life, not merely a minor difference of theological opinion or trivial ethical inconsistency. Truth and error are mutually exclusive, and a person either walks in God’s truth or his own way.

Since the straying individual is a Christian, the ‘death’ is probably physical death as a result of his sins, see Deut. 34:4-5, 1 Cor. 5:5; 11:29-30.

Deut. 34:4-5 – “Then the Lord said to Moses, “That is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when I said, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I have now allowed you to see it with your own eyes but you will not enter the land. So, Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, just as the Lord had said.”

1 Cor. 5:5 – “Then you must throw this man out and hand him over to Satan so that his sinful nature will be destroyed and he himself will be saved on the day the Lord returns.”

1 Cor. 11:29-30 – “For if you eat the bread or drink the cup without honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God’s judgment upon yourself. That is why many of you are weak and sick and some have died.”

The “sins” mentioned in verse 20 are those of the one restored. By bringing the errant one to repentance and confession, forgiveness is procured.

No duty given to Christians is more in keeping with the mind of the Lord or more expressive of Christian love, than the duty of reclaiming the backslider; and it is very certain that such a work cannot be accomplished except by prayer and personal effort.