

# JAMES

## GENUINE FAITH ON DISPLAY

TURNING A SINNER

GENUINE FAITH CALLS OTHERS TO GENUINE FAITH

JAMES 5:19-20

# OUTLINE OF JAMES

| Section | James   | Marks of Genuine Faith                             |
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|         | 1:1     | Greeting   |
| 1       | 1:2-18  | Genuine Faith Considers Trials as Joy              |
| 2       | 1:19-27 | Genuine Faith Receives the Word                    |
| 3       | 2:1-13  | Genuine Faith Loves without Favoritism             |
| 4       | 2:14-26 | Genuine Faith Produces Good Works                  |
| 5       | 3:1-12  | Genuine Faith is Shown in Your Speech              |
| 6       | 3:13-18 | Genuine Faith Exhibits a Humble Wisdom             |
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| 8       | 4:11-12 | Genuine Faith Recognizes One Lawgiver and Judge    |
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| 10      | 5:1-11  | Genuine Faith is Patient in God's Timing           |
| 11      | 5:12    | Genuine Faith Tells the Truth                      |
| 12      | 5:13-18 | Genuine Faith Prays                                |
| 13      | 5:19-20 | <b>Genuine Faith Calls Others to Genuine Faith</b> |

# JAMES 5:19-20

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My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know 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.

1. The Sad Occurrence
2. The Significant Opportunity
3. The Supernatural Outcome

# 1. THE SAD OCCURRENCE (V.19)

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my brothers – new topic introduced

if any among you strays from the truth

- if - This is presented as a possibility, and we our experience tells us it is a frequent reality.
- among you – We are considering those form within our midst who stray. This was a reality at that time and certainly is for us as well!

stray from the truth – who are we considering here?

## A. A Christian who gets tripped up in sin

Problems with this interpretation:

- 1) **sinner** – almost always refers to an unbeliever (e.g., Rom. 5:8); used to refer to an unbeliever in James 4:8:

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

- 2) The result of this person turning from the error of his way is that his “**soul is saved from death**,” referring to the point of salvation.

stray from the truth – who are we considering here?

## **B. A Christian who loses his salvation**

There is a theological problem with this interpretation. This conflicts what Scripture teach about the Perseverance of the Saints:

A person who is united with Christ by the power of God is kept secure by God until glorification.

- 1) God elects a person from before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:3-5; 2 Timothy 1:9).
- 2) This work of salvation is completely a work of grace, not earned in any respect by our good works (Ephesians 2:8-9).

- 3) God's work of salvation is for the purpose of conforming us to the image of Christ, both through sanctification in this life and unto glorification in the life to come (Romans 8:29-30). God does all the work in predestining, justifying, and glorifying the sinner.
- 4) God promises that nothing can snatch us out of the Father's hand, nothing can separate us from the love of God, and since God began a good work in us, He will bring it to completion (John 6:37-40; Romans 8:35-39; Philippians 1:6).

God causes us to be born again by His mercy, reserves our inheritance for us, and protects us in faith until that final day (1 Peter 1:3-5). The work of salvation is all the work of God, and we cannot undo what God has accomplished.



## But what about those have walked away?

There are two possibilities:

- a. The first possibility is that this person who is truly a Christian will eventually repent his/her backsliding (e.g., Peter).
- b. The second possibility is that this person, while close to the truth, never came to genuine saving faith. We must recognize that not every profession of faith is genuine (Matt. 7:21-23).

**1 John 2:19** – They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.



**stray from the truth** – who are we considering here?

### **C. A church attender who is found to not have genuine faith**

**Jesus said it would be like this!**

- ⇒ Two of the four soils described by Jesus looked good at first, only to later reveal that there was no saving faith (Matt 13:1-9, 18-23).
- ⇒ The field of the landowner had wheat and tares growing together and the separation of the two would only come at the harvest (Matt. 13:24-30).

**James said it would be like this!**

- ⇒ Some say they have faith but are not doers of the Word (1:22). Some claim faith while treating others in the church with contempt (2:1-10). Some proclaim there is only one God but live a life inconsistent with saving faith (2:14-26).

if any among you strays from the truth

- **stray:** “to lead astray, to deceive, to cause to wander” This verb is in the passive voice, meaning the person was led astray. That reality does not remove culpability, but should increase our sympathy.
- **truth:** Both doctrinal and obedience to that truth is intended here – James would not have made a distinction between the two! This is confirmed in verse 20 by stating that this person must turn from the “error of his ways.”
  - ⇒ This wandering from the truth is most frequently a series of small choices. Small sins lead to greater one with greater harmful consequences, so we should seek those who go astray right away!

## 2. THE SIGNIFICANT OPPORTUNITY (V.19-20)

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if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back

- **turns** - “to cause someone to turn or return” See Acts 3:19; Acts 26:16-18; 1 Thess. 1:9. It refers to turning to God from sin and often is used in combination with repentance.
  - ⇒ **This is referring to someone repenting and coming to saving faith!**
  - ⇒ **We have the opportunity to be part of this process of bringing someone to saving faith!**

## Objection #1: What if I don't know if the person who has strayed is truly an unbeliever or a believer who is temporarily in disobedience?

- It is true that we don't know anyone else's heart. The person that we are pursuing may not know either, for sin is deceptive and we can deceive ourselves.
  - ⇒ But while we don't know whether someone is truly saved or not, the solution for both is the same – repent!
  - ⇒ You don't need to figure this out, God will sort it out at the end. We either have the opportunity to rescue a brother or sister from the devastating effects of sin or turn an unbeliever to Christ – both wins!

## Objection #2: I can't accomplish this! I can't get another person to repent!

- You are right! In your power you absolutely can't do it!
  - ⇒ But God can change any person, and He can use you in the process!
    - God can rescue people without our help (e.g., Abram, Saul).
    - But God usually does use us people as His instrument to bring others to faith (2 Cor. 5:19).
  - ⇒ Don't miss that this opportunity is not just for pastors or elders!
    - The fact that God uses imperfect people like you and me does not diminish His glory, it magnifies it!

### 3. THE SUPERNATURAL OUTCOME (V.19-20)

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... will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

- will save his soul from death – this is not physical death (since we are speaking of one's soul), but eternal spiritual death, hell itself.
  - Scripture explains the eternal conscious torment of hell is a reality for those who die in their sins (Mark 9:43-48; Matt. 3:12). This is a sobering reality we must believe.
- will cover a multitude of sins – this is not the hiding of sin, but the forgiveness of sin through the completed work of Christ (Ps. 32:1; 85:2).



# APPLICATION

## Obstacles to cast off:

- **Selfishness** – completely absorbed by personal responsibilities and desires.
- **Fear** – afraid of the response that you might receive.
- **Doubt** – failure to believe that God can use you.



# APPLICATION

## Steps forward:

- **Pay attention** – get to know others on Sundays and at your Bible Study. Ask questions and listen to their responses.
- **Pray** – ask how you can pray for them – then do it!
- **Pursue** – if someone goes missing, find out what is going on. The motive must be love!
- **Point to Christ** – speak of the truth of the gospel and God's grace in your own life.