Sunday, November 1, 2026 pm

STUDIES IN JAMES (20)
Bringing Back the Fallen Brother
James 5:19-20

For the past 2 years we have been studying through the book of James. We have noted this to be a very practical book, likely written by James the brother of Jesus to early Jewish converts scattered because of persecutions. James gives practical direction in many areas of life – 1) Facing trials with wisdom, faith and endurance (1:2-8); 2) Overcoming temptations (1:12-18); 3) Being doers of God's word rather than hearers (1:21-27); 4) Avoiding favoritism (2:1-13), 5) Showing your faith by your actions (2:14-26), 6) Controlling your tongue (3:1-12, 1:19-20, 4:11-12); 7) Letting God's wisdom direct your life (3:13-18); 8) Treating one another properly; 8) Keeping God in your plans (4:13-17); 9) Having a proper perspective toward wealth and your possessions (5:1-6); 10) Living with patience (5:7-12); 11) Helping and praying for one another (5:13-18). In all of this we have continually emphasized personal godly living and our dependence on one another. In summary, we NEED each other and must nurture our godly relationship.

We conclude our study of James with one final admonition – restoring an erring brother. It is 2 simple verses, but filled with meaning designed to keep us together. As I begin I think of what Jesus taught in Luke 15:1-7 where He describes a shepherd who has a hundred sheep, but notices one is lost. He leaves the flock to find the one and when he finds it, he puts in on his shoulder and returns to the fold rejoicing. In vs. 7, Jesus said, *I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance*. So let us address this final admonition – bringing back an erring brother.

I. The context (5:19-20)
   a. ***Brethren*** – James begins with this term of endearment AND a reminder that we are family.
   b. ***If anyone wanders from the truth***.
      i. Throughout this letter James has described HOW one ought to live so as to remain faithful. The instructions are often direct and simple to understand. However, we all know that application is hard (sometimes VERY hard). And while we wish everyone acted ideally the truth is faith and love grows cold, discouragement and trials step in, temptations get us, life happens and we get into a rut.
      ii. ***Wanders*** - For some this leads to drifting away from the truth (cf. Hebrews 2:1), or being led astray by other forces. There are several passages that address one who leaves the faith:
         1. Matthew 18:12-14 is another scripture about a flock of sheep. Here the phrase, "*one of them goes astray*" is used.
         2. 2 Peter 2:20-22 warns of those who had escaped being entangled again in the world.
         3. Galatians 1:6-7, Paul is concerned about those considering turning to a different gospel. In Galatians 5:4 he summarizes such by saying, *You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace*.
         4. The Hebrew letter consistently warns of those who drift away (Hebrews 2:1-2) and who forsake their brethren (Hebrews 10:25-26ff).
         5. There are many ways one might "wander from the truth" – false doctrine, returning to a life of sin, failing to endure (quitting the race), or losing one's love and commitment (simply existing and doing the very least, indifference, apathy).
      iii. ***From the truth*** – this is descriptive of the way of Christ. James have given practical instruction about HOW to remain faithful IN Christ.
   c. ***And someone turns him back –*** if we are truly family and someone is in crisis, we care! We will not simply let them continue to deteriorate. We will notice and take whatever measures we can to restore them.

i. ***WHO is that someone?*** Is it you? Galatians 6:1 – you who are spiritual

ii. ***To turn back is about bringing one to repentance.*** Returning them to a state of faithfulness.

d. ***Let him know that … he will:***

i. ***Let him know*** – words of encouragement to one who is willing to put forth this effort. <u>It will NOT go unnoticed</u> – by the one restored, by others who were equally concerned AND by God and our Lord.

ii. ***Save a soul from death –*** spiritual death is the result of sin (Romans 6:23). This is WHY we are trying to win them back.

1. Hebrews 10:35-39 – a warning to not cast away your confidence. To draw back is to fall out of favor with God.
2. 2 Peter 2:22 – the latter end is worse than the beginning
3. 2 Timothy 2:12 - *If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us*.
4. 2 Corinthians 13:5 warns us to constantly examine ourselves lest we become disqualified.
5. Hebrews 10:26 – there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin.
6. John 15:6 – if we fail to (continue to) abide in Christ, we are cast out, withered and burned.

iii. ***Will cover a multitude of sins –*** the best answer to this is describing the one who is restored. He has been forgiven of ALL his sins as he/she returns to the Lord. There are also other considerations – future sins if one continues a life of unfaithfulness, sins involving others, including brethren, etc. It is NOT about hiding what one has done, but God forgiving and removing it. Cf. Psalm 32:1-2, *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute* (charge, take into account – LSB – TT) *iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

II. HOW do we turn them back?

a. There are some key passages that help us with this.

b. Galatians 6:1-2.

i. <u>First, we need to be right with God ourselves</u> –If you are not genuinely committed to the Lord, how much effort will you put forth to win someone back? Matthew 7:3-4 where Jesus speaks of (righteous) judging he notes that you take care of the plank in your eye before worrying about the splinter in your brother's eye.

ii. <u>With a spirit of gentleness</u> – (mild, even tempered, controlled) while there are times for harsh or strong measures (cf. Jude 22-23), other times call for compassion and caring. In all we do, we use wisdom to ensure the greatest chance for success. NOTE: This is typically the FIRST step!

iii. <u>Considering yourself lest you also be tempted</u> – we must ensure that what we are doing will not lead to sinful conduct ourselves. There are limits to what you can do in helping a wandering brother.

iv. <u>Bear one another's burdens</u> – if someone is wounded with sin, help him – just like the Good Samaritan did. We see of that in our last lesson on James 5:13-16 – helping the sick (in which we noted that it at least includes a spiritual application). 1 Thessalonians 5:14 speaks of comforting the fainthearted, upholding the weak and being patient with all.

c. 2 Timothy 2:24-25 – when one is "in opposition" (to the truth – either in teaching OR action), we correct them with humility. The prideful, "I know better" attitude rarely helps to restore a fallen brother.

d. 1 John 4:20-21 - Remember love – our actions toward one another is prompted by genuine love. Ephesians 4:2 calls for us to bear with one another with love. 1 Peter 4:8 says, *And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins."*
e. Matthew 18:15-17 is a good rule of thumb regarding procedure.
    i. If a brother sins (against you?) go to him alone
    ii. If that does not work, take with you 1 or 2 witnesses
    iii. If that still does not work, tell it to the church
    iv. THEN, if it does not work withdraw from the brother. WHY? Your hope is that properly exercised discipline will prompt him to return – cf. 1 Corinthians 5:4-5 – note the goal.
f. ONE more thought: Restoring another brother is NOT about:
    i. Gossip – telling everyone else about someone's problems
    ii. Being a busybody and looking for problems or creating them (problems that were not there in the first place). This is BAD judging – cf. Matthew 7:1-2
    iii. Public rebuke BEFORE trying less extreme measures (there are exceptions – such as blatant public false doctrine)
    iv. Ignoring one's sins and hope they go away on their own. It rarely happens and ONLY if the one who is guilty comes to repentance through his own actions.

III. **The book of James ends abruptly**. Why? We are not told. But there are several possible reasons:
a. Perhaps his audience was impersonal to Him (not directly addressed to a specific group or individuals whom he knew).
b. Add to this James might simply be a man of few (but oh so powerful) words.
c. Also, as we have alluded to, what he says in these last verses summarizes what to do with one who is guilty of the various concerns addressed throughout this book. It ties in well with the previous section about how we are to confess to and pray for one another.
d. It also emphasizes the importance of the community of believers – we need each other and must do everything we can to bring back those who have strayed from us.
e. The ending also emphasizes the "business-like" direction of these instructions. This is not a personal and intimate letter – it is spiritual and heavenward instructions that we all need.
f. Finally, perhaps James is encouraging any who are faithful to help restore anyone who is guilty of violating ANYTHING he has addressed throughout this relatively short letter.

So much more could be said about this subject and the book of James, but it is my hope that we have found appreciation for the numerous practical admonitions addressed. If we were to apply the principles James has addressed we would be considered faithful to God and our Lord. What about you? How great is your faith? Think about it.