

James 5:1-12

Commentary: Enduring Injustice (James 5:1-12)

In the previous chapter James rebuked certain believers for a lack of humility and the practise of self-exaltation (4:10-17). He took particular issue with the boastful arrogance of those wealthier believers that had a complete disregard for the authority of God over their lives (4:13-16). It appears that these wealthier believers didn't just have a disregard for God, but also their fellow believer. The rich within the early church were guilty of gaining their wealth by exploiting and taking advantage of their labourers (those poorer members in the church). James pronounces the certain judgement of God upon these wealthy church members by envisioning a courtroom setting in which their material possessions will be used to testify against them.

James then exhorts those poorer believers that have been oppressed by the rich to endure through injustice; urging them to remain patient as they await the return of the Lord. James uses examples from nature and the endurance demonstrated by the Old Testament prophets to remind his readers, and us today, that God rewards patience and perseverance in the midst of suffering.

Instructions:

Carefully read through James 5:1-12 and then attempt to answer the questions which follow.

One of the issues that James had with the wealthy members in the church was in regard to the way they treated others; especially the labourers who worked for them. These rich were notorious for using their money to buy off courts and pervert justice.

1) How will the court of God's judgement turn their wealth against them (v3)?

2) Of what offences will the wealthy believers be judged (v2-6)?

James accuses the wealthy members of the church from cheating the labourers (poorer members of the church) out of their wages. This was strictly prohibited by the Law in Deuteronomy 24:14-15.

3) Why was it necessary for these poor labourers to be paid on time (Deut 24:14-15)?

The word 'Sabaoth' (v4) is a transliteration of the Hebrew word for 'host' or 'armies'. James uses this Old Testament title to emphasise the all sufficient, sovereign and all powerful nature of God.

4) What does James want his readers to understand about God by using this title (v4)?

The statements James makes about these wealthy members of the church would have encouraged the less-wealthy labourers that God was aware of their plight. James will now take this message one step further by encouraging these members to continue to endure.

5) What attitude is essential for enduring injustice (v7)?

6) What reasons does James offer to motivate believers to remain patient while enduring injustice (7-11)?

7) What analogy does James use to illustrate how God rewards patience (v7)?

James commands believers not to complain (groan or sigh) against one another (against other believers). There is a tendency when we experience difficulties and disappointments in life to seek others to blame or lash out against.

8) Why does James command we not do this (v9)

9) What instead do we owe our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ?

10) What spiritual truth should give us hope as we endure patiently (v11)?

James echos Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount: "You shall not swear falsely... but let your 'yes' be 'yes', and your 'no', 'no'" (Matthew 5:33, 37).

People would make oaths to "prove" that what they were saying was trustworthy and true by calling upon God to give validity to their commitments. In James' day this practise was misused and had become a form of profanity as people would enact the name of God frequently and flippantly. In times of stress and affliction it is common to become impatient and lose self-control resulting in things said that were better left unspoken

11) What command does James give in relation to oath taking (v12)?