

# James 5

Last time we saw James continue to encourage the twelve tribes scattered abroad in their persecutions. To tell them not to be like the rich man, not to desire to get gain. To recognize the wickedness of these people, how those are the people that are persecuting them. They shouldn't desire to emulate them.

But instead they need to be patient until the coming of the Lord, when he will deliver them. Do not focus on gain and riches that they will get for themselves here. But instead to hope in the glory they have in Christ and his kingdom.

James compared it to how the husbandman, the farmer, waits for the precious fruit of the earth, until he receives the early and latter rain. He knows that the fruit is not going to be brought forth until the right season comes, and it has received the rain that will make it grow. First it needs to receive an early rain, so that it will spring up. And then it needs to receive another latter rain, so that it can finally bring forth fruit.

And those former and latter rains that the children of Israel need to receive are Christ's first and second comings to this earth. They need to wait patiently unto the coming of the Lord, because that is the latter rain that will cause the precious fruit of the earth to bring forth. That is when they will partake in the glory of Christ's kingdom, and be exalted. When the rich are made low. And so he told them to establish their hearts, because it is drawing nigh. They need to stay sound in the faith, and be those that will be exalted, not those that will be brought low.

He told them to grudge not one against another, lest they be condemned. The judge stands before the door. They need to willingly help those in need, lest they be counted with the goats. Rather, they need to be like the prophets in the OT, who received persecution: they need to establish their hearts, and endure. Because we count them happy which endure. They've seen the end of the Lord with Job, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy. So they need to trust in that deliverance, and not in themselves.

That seems like a pretty good way to end the book right there. Talking about being patient unto the coming of the Lord.

But James has one final admonition for them here.

And so that is what we're going to look at today.

## Verse 12

**James 5:12** But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

So James is giving them this admonition "above all things," above everything else that he's told them.

"Above all things, swear not."

And of course James would say that the thing above all others would be something that has to do with speech. That's his theme here, is our conversation.

So he tells them that above all things to swear not, by any oath. Lest they fall into condemnation.

**James 5:9** Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be **condemned**: behold, the judge standeth before the door.

So he warned them about being condemned, if they grudge one against another. But above all things he warns them against swearing, lest they be condemned. He's saying that that is something that God would judge them for.

Now, there is actually nothing wrong with swearing to something, with confirming something by an oath.

In fact in Hebrews we read how God swore to Abraham, confirmed his promise by an oath. And there are other times in the Bible where the LORD swears to something. And where other righteous men swear to something.

So that is clearly not a sin.

**Deuteronomy 6:13** Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and *shalt swear by his name*.

So they were actually commanded to swear, in the law, but only by the name of the LORD. Not by false gods.

In fact the Bible says that every one of us shall swear unto God:

**Isaiah 45:23** I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall **swear**.

So Quakers, and all of those people who think that swearing is wrong, are all going to have to swear one day, because God is going to compel them to. Every tongue shall swear.

So there is nothing wrong with taking an oath, or with swearing to something, swearing by God to confirm your sincerity. The Bible doesn't say anything against that.

But the Bible does warn against swearing falsely. And against swearing by false gods, or by anything other than the the LORD. Or swearing in vain, taking God's name in vain.

It warns against swearing just as a vanity. Trivializing it, so that you're swearing all the time, as many people do.

And I think that is what James is talking about here.

You see, Jesus addressed this same thing to his disciples.

**Matthew 5:33** Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not **forswear** thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine **oaths**:

34 But I say unto you, **Swear not** at all; **neither by heaven**; for it is God's throne:

35 Nor **by the earth**; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.

36 Neither shalt thou **swear** by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.

37 But let your communication be, **Yea, yea; Nay, nay**: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

So there in the sermon on the mount Jesus said almost the exact same thing that James said here.

He told his disciples not to swear by heaven or by the earth. Same thing James says.

But Jesus gave a reason, he explained his rationale behind that. He said don't swear by heaven, because it is God's throne. So in essence, to swear by heaven is still to swear by God. You're still swearing by him, by his throne. So don't swear by heaven. And don't swear by the earth either, because it is his footstool. Same thing again. So don't swear by the earth either, that's about the same thing as swearing by God. Just let your yes be yes, and your no be no. Because whatsoever is more than that cometh of evil. In other words, don't try to be colorful. Don't sprinkle a bunch extra stuff in your speech. When you want to say yes, just say yes, and when you want to say no, just say no.

So he's not talking about taking an oath, he's just talking about your daily communication. And he's warning them against using oaths, against adding things to their speech, that are just vanities. Superfluities of naughtiness, like he talked about before. That they may think are harmless, but he says actually come from evil.

Would you say, "I swear to God" that this or that? would you take God's name in vain that way? Then don't swear by anything else either. Don't say "I swear to heaven," because according to Christ, it's all the same thing.

You see, we learn later in the book of Matthew that the Jewish religion had come up with rules about which oaths were harmless and which ones weren't. And Christ didn't subscribe to that way of thinking at all. He told his disciples not to trivialize swearing, no matter what they were swearing to. And he told the religious leaders his thoughts on that as well, that every oath like that carries that same weight to it.

**Matthew 23:16** Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall **swear** by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall **swear** by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!  
17 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?  
18 And, Whosoever shall **swear** by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever **sweareth** by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.  
19 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?  
20 Whoso therefore shall **swear** by the altar, **sweareth** by it, and by all things thereon.  
21 And whoso shall **swear** by the temple, **sweareth** by it, and by him that dwelleth therein.  
22 And he that shall **swear by heaven, sweareth** by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

So Jesus said those aren't harmless oaths that are nothing. You're ultimately still swearing by God. So don't swear. You want to say yes, say yes, you want to say no, say no.

And so that is what James is saying here. Curb their speech, keep it simple, lest they fall into condemnation. Lest they take God's name in vain. Lest they swear to something and don't really mean it, and don't do it. Don't trivialize swearing. Don't be a swearer. Don't be somebody who goes around doing it. Don't add extraneous stuff like that to your speech, because it comes of evil. They call them minced oaths. It may not seem like it means anything, but you can be sure that it comes of evil.

*Last time we saw how when Christ returned, he would be as the latter rain. He would give judgment against the wicked, the rich and the mighty, and deliver the oppressed. And as a result of that the precious fruit of the earth would be brought forth. Israel would flourish, with all of the poor and righteous of the earth. Judah and Ephraim would be reunited in Christ's kingdom, and Ephraim would govern among the nations, and increase as he had increased.*

*So the rain would come down, Christ would give judgment, and the grass would flourish.*

*Now this time we've seen James give them some final admonition. And his exhortation relates directly to the tribulation.*

*The first thing that he told them was to not swear in their speech. Reminding us of how most of his epistle has been about speech.*

*And so we've pointed out before that that is fitting for the tribulation, because that is the nature of the 144000.*

*It says of the 144000:*

**Revelation 14:5** *And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.*

*So that is how the 144000 will be, in their mouth will be no guile.*

*And that is the way that all Israel should be, because when Christ comes back he is going to cut off all false swearers:*

**Malachi 3:5** *And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false **swearers**, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.*

*So with the rich oppressor the false swearer will also be cut off.*

## Verse 13

**James 5:13** *Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.*

And when do people often use these kinds of exclamations?

When they're really happy or really upset.

But James offers some alternatives.

If you are afflicted, something bad just happened to you, and feel like swearing, he said, "let him pray." Pray instead.

And if you're merry, if something good just happened, and you're really feeling good about it, don't swear. Instead, let him sing psalms.

Don't swear by these things, that are ultimately swearing by God, just mincing it.

Instead engage with God directly. Pray to him or praise him. Don't take his name in vain. But genuinely acknowledge him in praise or worship.

## Verse 14

**James 5:14** Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

The same thing when you're sick. That's not an excuse for swearing either.

You're feeling real bad, or you're almost out of your head? Sorry, that still doesn't count as an excuse.

If you are sick, then seek healing from God, just as the afflicted are directed to pray, not swear. Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

So use God's name genuinely. Not in vain.

## Verse 15

**James 5:15** And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

So the sick will be healed.

They will anoint him with oil, and pray over him, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has sinned, and that is why he is sick, he will be forgiven.

There is a passage from Jesus's ministry that really stands out as an illustration of this:

**Mark 2:3** And they come unto him, bringing one **sick** of the palsy, which was borne of four.

4 And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the **sick** of the palsy lay.

So these four men brought this sick man to Jesus.

5 When Jesus saw their **faith**, he said unto the **sick** of the palsy, Son, thy **sins be forgiven** thee.

So when Jesus saw the faith of the men bringing the sick man before him, he forgave the sick man's sins. Not based on his faith, but based on their faith.

And notice how it said that he saw their faith. So what was that faith? It was made manifest by their works, their actions. They came before him with this sick man. They really believed that he would heal him, because they were very diligent, and let nothing stop them.

So Jesus saw that, he could see their faith. They were men that believed that he could and would heal this sick man.

And so when Jesus saw that, he forgave the man's sins.

And then of course he went on to heal him as well, and tell him to arise and take his bed and walk.

And so as James said, "the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him."

And so that is how it is when a sick man calls for the elders of the church. Those men of faith come bringing him before God in prayer, having anointed him with oil. And their prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And God will forgive his sins.

So there is an implication here, that a man might be sick because of sins. Some sin that he had committed.

And that is something that it speaks of elsewhere in the NT as well.

In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul tells the Corinthians that some of them are sick because of something that they have done:

**1 Corinthians 11:23** For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:

24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

So here they are taking the Lord's supper. But they are taking it in vain. They're doing it unworthily.

They do it in an unworthy manner, a manner not worthy of the cup of the LORD.

And he said that when they do that they are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

That sounds very similar to what we just saw in regard to swearing, how if you swore by heaven, you were guilty of swearing by God. So you shouldn't swear unworthily. You shouldn't swear in vain. You should only take an oath after forethought and reflection, and do so in a reverent manner worthy of God's name.

And the same when you take the cup of the Lord.

28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

So examine yourself, take heed to yourself, how you are doing it.

It isn't something to be done passively.

It must be done in a worthy manner.

29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

He said if you don't take care, and you do it unworthily, without due reverence, then you'll be damning yourself, God will punish you.

He said you're not discerning the Lord's body. You're eating and drinking it just like you'd eat and drink anything else. Not discerning the Lord's body, which it represents.

Just like you might swear by heaven, not discerning the throne of God and him that sitteth thereon.

You'll be guilty, and God may punish you.

30 For this cause many are weak and **sickly** among you, and many sleep.

So because of this they were sick, and God even killed some of them, they were sick unto death, and died because of it. Because they were eating and drinking the symbols of Christ's death unworthily.

31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.

32 But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

But instead, they should judge themselves. They should examine themselves, and see if they are doing it worthily or not, if they are giving due reverence to it, if they are perceiving the body of Christ which it represents.

They should judge themselves, and then they won't be judged.

And so it is the same thing with swearing.

If you don't discern the LORD and his name, and you use it unworthily, you might be punished with sickness.

But the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

So God will forgive him, when men of faith pray over him, if that is why he is sick. And he will heal him and raise him up.

## Verse 16

**James 5:16** Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Confess their faults to each other, and pray, that they might receive healing.

The prayer of a righteous man is effectual. It has effect. It causes things to happen. It isn't just words, it gets results.

There's a saying that prayer changes things.

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

The prayer of a righteous man, the prayer of faith.

A fervent prayer.

We know what it means to be fervent. The Bible uses that along with being diligent, and not slothful, being earnest. Having an earnest desire, like a fervent heat, it also says.

**Colossians 4:12** Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring **fervently** for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

13 For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you...

So he labored fervently in prayers, having great zeal.

And that kind of fervent prayer of a righteous man is effectual and availeth much. It's not to no avail, it availeth much.

And James gives an example to demonstrate that:

## Verse 17

**James 5:17** Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

So just as he told them to take the prophets as an example of suffering affliction and of patience, he gives them the example of Elijah the prophet and how he prayed.

James says that he is a fitting example for them, because he was a man subject to like passions as they are.

Now a passion is something that is suffered or received at the hands of an external agent. It is something that is imposed or impressed upon a body, not something that it initiates. We talk today of our passions as our feelings. The drives of the mind and emotions that impel us. They act as an agent that moves us, moves our bodies. But originally it referred to external agents that act upon a body. Something that it suffers, that is imposed upon it.

And so Christ's suffering was famously called his passion:

**Acts 1:3** To whom also he shewed himself alive after his **passion** by many infallible proofs...

So he showed himself alive after his suffering, after his persecution, after being slain. So he was suffering at the hands of an external agent. They crucified him. That was his passion.

And so when he says that Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, he is saying the same thing. That Elias was subject to external agents, causing him to suffer. Persecuting him. He was subjected to persecution. He was subject to like passions as they are. The rich condemning and killing the just. But they need to wait patiently to the coming of the Lord. They need to be like the husbandman waiting for the precious fruit of the earth, until he receive the latter rain.

But look at what Elias prayed in his passions. Even as he was suffering persecution, he prayed earnestly that it might not rain. And it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

So Elijah was suffering persecution, but yet he continued to pray something, that he knew was going to continue to raise the king of Israel against him. And he continued suffering, and he continued praying, for three years and six months, while he remained subject to like passions as them.

And the implication here is that they are called upon to do the same. They are called upon first to pray that it might not rain. Even though they are subject to suffering persecution. They need to follow in the footsteps of Elijah, and pray that it might not rain, even though that will increase their sufferings.

Do you remember what the rain was? Last time we talked about how it is the word of God, the word of Christ upon his return. In particular how Christ would give judgement. The judge standeth before the door.

And so the rain was God pronouncing judgement on people, his judgement coming. But James is telling them here to pray for one another, that they might be healed. He's telling them to pray that God would not bring judgment on their brethren for their faults. But that he would forgive them, and raise them up. So they are to pray that it might not rain, that God wouldn't condemn their brethren, that he wouldn't punish them. But that he'd forgive them. That he'd stay his hand, stay from pronouncing judgement, and instead forgive.

And so like Elijah they'll be praying that it might not rain. And James said that that is an effectual prayer. Elijah prayed that for three years and six months, and it didn't rain. And so their prayer will also be effectual in holding God back from judging those among them that have transgressed the faith. God will hold back, and heal them. The prayer of faith shall save the sick.

And just as it was for Elijah, when they pray that, they may be prolonging their own persecution. By seeking that God might hold back his wrath until their brethren have repented, they are also holding back God's judgement on their persecutors. But Elijah was a man subject to like passions as them, and yet he prayed earnestly that it might not rain. And so they need to be willing to do the same, even if it is at their own expense, even if it prolongs their temptations.

*But the most fascinating thing that he says here is when he is talking about Elijah, and how he prayed that it might not rain for three years and six months.*

*After three years and six months they are killed. They can no longer pray to hold back the rain on the earth. And so it comes.*

*For three years and six months Israel will be called upon to pray that Christ would not come back yet. That he would refrain. That God would hold back his wrath. That the antichrist would be given free course. That the earth would be desolate. That the prophets of God would have to hide in caves from the Jezebels of the earth. For three years and six months, the second half of the tribulation, this is to be the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man.*

## Verse 18

**James 5:18** And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

But eventually there will come a time, when they will pray again. When like Elijah they will begin to pray *for* rain, not to hold it back any longer.

And then the heaven will give rain, and the earth will bring forth her fruit.

They will have to have long patience for the precious fruit of the earth, until they receive the latter rain. But one day it will come the time to pray for it, and they will, and it will come, and the earth will bring forth her fruit.

And so as the prayer of Elijah was, their prayers are effectual. They do avail much. They will avail to save the sick now, by holding back God's wrath. And so when the time comes, they can be sure that they will also avail to bring God's judgement on the wicked.

*But after three years and six months, as Elijah did, they will pray again. In the time of the latter rain, they will pray for rain. And the heaven will give rain, and the earth will bring forth her fruit.*

*They will avail in the end to hold back the wrath of God, and then to bring his rain on the earth.*

*Revelation 11:3 And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.*

*4 These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.*

*5 And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed.*

*6 These have power to shut heaven, that it **rain** not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.*

*7 And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.*

*8 And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.*

*9 And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves.*

*10 And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.*

*11 And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them.*

*12 And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them.*

*13 And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.*

*14 The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly.*

*15 And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.*

*16 And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God,*

*17 Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.*

*18 And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.*

19 And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.

## Verses 19 & 20

**James 5:19** Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him;  
20 Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

*You see, by praying earnestly that it might not rain, they are praying that God wouldn't bring judgment yet. That the wicked and the sinner would have more time to repent. And so they should be motivated to do that, knowing that there are those among their brethren that still need to repent. That is what is what is motivating that prayer. Knowing that even of those that will be saved there are some that are in sin, and need to repent if they want to receive a full reward.*

*And so they pray that God would not pronounce judgement yet. That he would wait until they are all ready. That he would wait until they have corrected their faults. Until they are more just and righteous. Until they have a fuller faith. Until they have better justified themselves. Until their patience has had its perfect work, and made them perfect and entire, wanting nothing. That those that err from the truth might be converted. That a soul might be saved from death, and multitude of sins hidden.*

*So there is even a danger that they will die from sickness brought on them as a punishment for their sin, just as it happened to many in Corinth. But if any do err from the truth, and one convert him he shall save a soul from death.*

So in this case we have a man, who might not be sick, but he is erring from the truth. And he is converted, and thus escapes that punishment of sickness and death.

So what does this mean, to err from the truth, and to be converted?

### ERR

First let's look at what it means to err.  
Here is how erring was described in context of the Law:

**Leviticus 5:17** And if a soul sin, and commit any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the LORD; though he wist it not, yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity.

18 And he shall bring a ram without blemish out of the flock, with thy estimation, for a trespass offering, unto the priest: and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his ignorance wherein he **erred** and wist it not, and it shall be forgiven him.

19 It is a trespass offering: he hath certainly trespassed against the LORD.

So this man erred. He trespassed against the LORD. He did something that was forbidden, and is guilty. Even if he did it ignorantly, he was still trespassing, still breaking the commandment, and he was still guilty, and he would still bear his iniquity.

If you think about the term err, and how the Bible uses it, it usually uses it in that context. To err is to do something unknowingly. It is to commit an error. It isn't intentional, you didn't know any better.

**Psalms 19:12** Who can understand his **errors**? cleanse thou me from secret faults.

13 Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

It parallels errors with secret faults. It asks who can understand his errors? How do you know where you have erred?

And it contrasted that with presumptuous sins, that are committed knowingly. It called that the great transgression.

**Matthew 22:29** Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do **err**, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.

So they erred, because they didn't know the scriptures. They were ignorant, and so they fell into error.

And so what does it mean to err from the faith?

It means that you are doing something contrary to the faith, you are transgressing, and you are ignorant and don't realize it. You may not think that what you are doing is wrong, you may not think about it, or you may think that what you are doing is right.

But that doesn't mean that God won't hold you guilty. He certainly will.

Ignorance is a deadly sin. And when a soul sins through ignorance, that is a soul that may need to be saved from death.

Remember those people in Corinth? They didn't know why they dying. Paul had to tell them, "for *this* cause many are sickly among you, and many sleep."

So they were erring, and God killed them for it.

Because they were transgressing, and though they did it ignorantly, yet they were guilty, and they bore their iniquity.

And remember what their sin was? They weren't discerning the Lord's body. They weren't reverencing the Lord's supper.

And that is the same kind of thing that it was talking about in Leviticus there, when it was talking about a soul erring and being guilty.

Here is the transgression that it was speaking of, specifically:

**Leviticus 5:15** If a soul commit a trespass, and sin through ignorance, *in the holy things of the LORD*;

If he were to eat or to defile any of the holy things of the LORD, the sacrifices, or the holy portion that was supposed to be for the priests, or the Levites, then he was trespassing on what was holy, and God would hold him guilty.

He had used it or eaten it or defiled it in some way, unknowingly, when it wasn't supposed to be for him, he wasn't holy.

And so that is the same kind of trespass that is committed when you take the Lord's supper unworthily, is it not?

You are eating it, but you aren't doing so in a worthy manner. And so you aren't discerning the Lord's body, and thus you are defiling that which is holy. You're not remembering what it represents.

And so God judged them for that. Even though they did it as if through ignorance, not knowing any better, he held them guilty.

And we also related that to what James was saying about swearing. How in the same way, swearing over vanity is not discerning the Lord's name.

And so there again that is a trespass.

And in fact that is one of the trespasses that it talks about in Leviticus at the start of that same chapter:

**Leviticus 5:1** And if a soul sin, and hear the voice of swearing, and is a witness, whether he hath seen or known of it; if he do not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity.

2 Or if a soul touch any unclean thing, whether it be a carcase of an unclean beast, or a carcase of unclean cattle, or the carcase of unclean creeping things, and if it be hidden from him; he also shall be unclean, and guilty.

3 Or if he touch the uncleanness of man, whatsoever uncleanness it be that a man shall be defiled withal, and it be hid from him; when he knoweth of it, then he shall be guilty.

4 Or if a soul swear, pronouncing with his lips to do evil, or to do good, whatsoever it be that a man shall pronounce with an oath, and it be hid from him; when he knoweth of it, then he shall be guilty in one of these.

5 And it shall be, when he shall be guilty in one of these things, that he shall confess that he hath sinned in that thing:

6 And he shall bring his trespass offering unto the LORD for his sin which he hath sinned, a female from the flock, a lamb or a kid of the goats, for a sin offering; and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his sin.

So if he swore about something, and didn't even realize it, he was sick or overjoyed or afflicted as James talked about here, he'd still be guilty. It would still be counted a sin.

Even though it was an error.

And in fact James already talked about erring once in the book of James, and I think that it is interesting to look at from this perspective:

**James 1:13** Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

16 Do not **err**, my beloved brethren.

17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

So James anticipated that they might blame God for their temptations. And he told them that they would be erring to say that. Every good gift is from above. Not evil. So let them be slow to speak and slow to wrath. Let them not say that God was doing them evil.

So they had an erroneous idea, they thought something that was not true. They were mistaken, and were in error, not knowing or not remembering that every good gift is from above. And I think it is interesting that because they thought that, they were accusing God of something. You could say that they were blaspheming his name, because they were saying that he was doing evil to them, and tempting them.

So that is one way that James talked about that they were erring from the truth. And that is a bit similar to what he was talking about here, in regard to swearing, and taking God's name in vain. They were erring, and blaspheming the name of God.

And so that is one way that they are erring, and that God might punish them for. And James told them there in chapter 1 what they should do instead. He told them to be slow to speak, but swift to hear. If they err from the truth then what they need to do is stop talking so much, and hear the word. God begat them with the word of truth, so let them hear the word. And that is the same thing that Jesus told the Sadducees. They erred, not knowing the scriptures. So to avoid that kind of error, you need to hear the word of God. That's how you can avoid erring from the truth.

So that is one way that they were erring, by taking God's name in vain. That's how they were erring before, blaspheming God, saying he was doing them evil.

And when they were erring before, it was also springing out of a desire to be rich. A desire to escape their temptations and persecutions, and to achieve a higher degree on this earth. That's why they were upset at God, they didn't like that he was supposedly bringing this evil upon them, they wanted peace and prosperity. And so the root of that error was that they wanted riches, they wanted prosperity. And they were double minded, and were trying to somehow seek that along with the faith of Christ. And James told them to stop. They were erring.

And so we've seen James again speaking about that desire for riches in these last chapters. And he's again warned them against it. And so that is another way that they are erring from the truth. That's another component of it.

**1 Timothy 6:9** But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.  
10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have **erred** from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

So Paul told Timothy that the love of money would cause people to err from the faith.

And he said that when they did that they pierced themselves through with many sorrows. They would fall into hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

It is something that God would severely punish them for.

And so that is another case where a soul needs to be saved from death. Where erring from the truth could cause God to make you sick for your sin.

So these are two things, seeking after riches, and not properly reverencing God and his name, that God sometimes punishes people for. Even killing them.

And this also relates to their other great desire, to be masters in the church.

Because they were not properly honoring God in that. They were doing it unworthily.

They weren't discerning the Lord's body. They weren't reverencing his name. He said that out of the same mouth proceeded blessing and cursing.

So these are different ways that they were erring from the truth.

And James says that "if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

## CONVERT

Now, what does it mean when he says, "and one convert him"?

Well, today we often use the term to refer to being born again, like saying that somebody got converted.

And that is in line with the way that the Bible uses it, but that isn't the only way that the Bible uses it.

As I've pointed out before, we often tend to take these words and give them a very narrow theological meaning, which doesn't actually reflect perfectly the way that word is used in scripture.

And that is the case here. The term convert is used in the OT as well as the new. It isn't just used to refer to being born again.

A good example of how it is used, and actually, the first time that it is used in scripture:

**Psalms 19:7** The law of the LORD is perfect, **converting** the **soul**: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

And that's a good fit for what James is talking about here. He is talking about erring from the truth. Being ignorant, having a wrong idea, that isn't scriptural. And so what those people need is to be made wise. They are simple, but they need to hear the truth, they need to hear the word of God. And that way their soul will be converted, and saved from death.

In other words, it will change their way of thinking. They'll no longer be in error, but they'll understand the truth. They'll be converted.

It doesn't mean they are being born again; they are already "brethren", James calls them. But it means that they were sinning and in error, and somebody showed them the truth, and so they were converted from that. They no longer do it.

**Psalms 51:13** Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and **sinner**s shall be **converted** unto thee.

So to be converted is to stop sinning. To be in sin, but to stop. To be in error, and transgressing, but to be taught God's ways.

A very relevant usage of the term is in Isaiah chapter 6.

**Isaiah 6:1** In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

2 Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.

4 And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

5 Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

So note here what Isaiah is distraught about. I've started from the beginning of the chapter so that you could see this.

He said that he is a man of unclean lips, and dwells in the midst of a people of unclean lips. Keep that in mind. Because that is something that James has been addressing here, really throughout this whole book, how they need to watch their speech, because they've been saying many things that they shouldn't.

So remember that as we go forward.

6 Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar:

7 And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

So the iniquity and sin was in their mouth, and Isaiah's was taken away.

8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.

So now his mouth is cleansed, he's ready to go, he can give God's message. He can show them their iniquity.

But God has other plans.

9 And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.

10 Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and **convert**, and be healed.

So God is trying to prevent their conversion. He doesn't want them to hear and understand. And notice how he talks about their ears and eyes, but doesn't talk about their mouth. Because that is their problem.

And God doesn't want them to understand their problem, because he doesn't want them to convert from their crooked speech and be healed.

So because of their unclean lips, they are sick, he says. And if they converted, they would be healed. Just as James has said here.

But God doesn't want that to happen. God doesn't want to have to heal them, so he doesn't want them to convert, he wants them to go on sinning. He wants them to continue having unclean lips, so that instead of healing them he can kill them.

11 Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate,

12 And the LORD have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land.

13 But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof.

So God takes this very seriously. When you have a sinner who has erred from the truth like that, and you convert him, you will save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins.

Even today, God does still judge people for this. But unlike Isaiah, we may be allowed to convert them from the error of their way. And when we do we save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins.

Instead of their sins having to be brought to light through God's punishment, they will turn from them. And so their sins will remain hidden. They will be just a thing of the past.

**1 Peter 4:7** But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.

8 And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the **multitude of sins.**

And so Peter also told them to pray, and to have charity toward each other, because that would cover the multitude of sins.

When you convert a sinner from the error of his way, you don't go and then gossip about it. You don't reveal what sin they were in that they've now converted from. They don't have to come before the church and make this big confession.

You are supposed to have charity toward each other, and cover the multitude of sins. Convert them that the sins of their error might remain hidden.

And that is how James ends his epistle. Just kind of abruptly. No glorious closing salutation and "Amen" as the apostle Paul would give.

He just leaves us with that thought. He closes abruptly on that note.

And I think it is clear why.

He's been addressing people here that are caught up in being masters in the church, and respecting persons, and not showing mercy. People who are religious, and are fighting and warring with each other.

So they've been in the habit of attacking one another, of judging each other very harshly, and not showing any mercy, not being forgiving.

And here James has given them a bunch of exhortation, that they are going to want to share with others.

They are going to look around, and see that there are a lot of people that aren't following this. And as they get themselves back on the right track, they're going to want to admonish others also.

And they should. They should indeed be doing that.

But James knows that they are in a habit of going about that the wrong way. And so the final thing that he wants to leave with them, the last thing that sticks in their mind, is that they do indeed need to convert a sinner from the error of his way, but when they do so they not only save a soul from death, but hide a multitude of sins.

And so that's the very final thing he says, "hide a multitude of sins."

That's how they should be approaching sharing this with others.

They shouldn't despise them and let them continue in error.

They should try to convert the sinner from the error of his way, because they may save a soul from death.

But they should also know that in doing so they can hide a multitude of sins. And so they should have charity as Peter said, and do that.

They shouldn't convert people for envy and strife, but to hide a multitude of sins.

So that concludes the book of James.

The book of James deals mainly with the twin desires that many of the Jews had for wealth and religious standing. Almost everything that he says is directly or indirectly related to one of those two things. He's either talking about their need not to get caught up in religion, or he's talking about their need not to get caught up in the desire for wealth.

And so James is basically a book about patience.

Standing strong in the faith through temptations, trials, and persecutions, and continuing to hope in Christ, and follow his word. Not to be shaken, or inhibited, or tempted by sin. But to continue to be doers of the word. That's patience.

And the two main things that distract us, that tempt us, that cause us to lose sight of our hope in Christ, are earthly wealth, and the desire to accepted and have recognition, and have peace and unity with the religions of this world that persecute the faith.

Those are the things that cause us not to be patient, that prevent patience from having its perfect work, that we might be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

And so those are the two things that James addresses here. Through it all, his focus being patience, staying sound in the faith, not being double minded, but keeping their mind fixed on their hope in Christ, and living that hope out.

That's been his been his focus, all through.

And so James began the book talking about patience, and finished it talking about patience.

And in the middle he gave them encouragement of what they should be doing, and rebuked for the things that they shouldn't be doing, if they want patience to have its perfect work.

So if you were going to use just one word to describe the book of James, it would be patience.

The subject of the book of James is how to let patience have its perfect work.

It's about what you should do during persecutions, during temptations, so that you can fully use them as a positive thing, that will better prepare you for the day when the hope shall be revealed. And so that in the mean time, you'll be able to rejoice, to count it all joy, knowing that the trial of your faith worketh patience, and that patience is having its perfect work. You're being made perfect and entire, wanting nothing.