

Faith Without Works is Useless

An Expository “Journey” Through the **Epistle of James**

23- The Unity of Christ’s Church in Spite of Suffering or Sin

Church 09/12/21

James 5:13-18

13 Is anyone among you suffering? *Then* he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.

14 Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;

15 and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.

18 Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

To the Glory of God

Now the reason I have lingered on this Passage is because there is so much false Teaching about what James was talking about here. As I said previously, the entire passage from verse 13 through verse 18 is about Prayer and NOT physical Healing. Now you may want to consult the previous Sermons to refresh your memory but you may recall that last time, I told you that James (inspired by the Holy Spirit to speak on behalf of God)- promises wonderful Results from the Elders' Comfort and Ministry of Intercession in that their “**prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick.**” Again, just as was true of **James 5:13**- the translation of “**sick**” here is very misleading and is NOT the best translation of the Greek word, *kamnoē*. Because in its only other New Testament usage (**Hebrews 12:3**) this word clearly does *NOT* refer to physical Illness.

For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary (*kamnœ*) and lose heart.

So, as I told you in the last Sermon- James speaks here of a *spiritual* Restoration of weak and defeated believers- who have suffered horribly at the hands of evil men and *NOT* physical Healing. And when James says in verse 15:

... the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick ...

... the English word, “**restore**” came from the Greek word, *sozœ*- which does *NOT* refer to physical Healing either. This word is most commonly translated as “*save*” throughout the New Testament- which is exactly the way the King James Version translates it. So, verse 15 in the KJV says,

And the prayer of faith shall save the sick...

... and so, because of a bad translation and real sloppy exegesis- people were actually taught for many years that physically sick people could enter into Salvation itself through the Prayers of the Elders!

But that makes no sense because the Scriptures are crystal clear that Salvation is entered into by Grace alone; through Faith alone; in the finished Work of Christ alone and *NOT* through the Prayers of the Elders or anybody else. And, in addition, the Bible, as a whole, teaches that Salvation has to be received *individually*. We can certainly pray that God will save someone. Yet even though we can and should pray that way- that individual must come to Christ himself. Elders can’t pray Salvation onto anyone else. So, we have to completely *reject* the translation of the KJV and dig deeper to find out just what James was teaching.

And the Answer is that in addition to the Greek word, “*sozœ*” being translated here in **James 5** as “*restore*”- this same word is also translated in other places as, “*delivered*” or “*rescued*”. And this begins to make more sense. So, the idea that James is trying to convey here is that the Elders' Prayers will “*deliver*” weak and defeated believers from their spiritual Weakness and “**restore**” them to spiritual Wholeness. But even at that- those Prayers are ineffectual alone. So, James says that it is the “**Lord**” Himself Who “**will raise up**” or “*encourage*” the weak.

Now the Greek word that was translated into English here in verse 15 as “**raise up**” (*egeirœ*) also means “*to awaken*” or “*to arouse*.” So, James is teaching here that through the righteous Prayers of godly Elders- God will “**restore**” or “*awaken*” or “*arouse*” His battered sheep's Enthusiasm and Trust in Him.

Now as an important foot note- James's also says that “**if**” one of these spiritually weak believers “**has committed sins, they will be forgiven him**”. And this provides further Evidence that this entire Passage has NOTHING to do with physical Healing. The Bible nowhere teaches that physical Sickness is the direct result of an individual's Sins. Sickness is the Result of the *Original Sin* of Adam that also brought about Death to our fleshly bodies. And so, while God may periodically heal our sick bodies through His great Mercy and Love- the Divine Curse of Death and Sickness (as well as other physical deformities and flaws)- is NEVER removed *permanently* from us- even in Salvation. And that is why saved people, who are very godly- die. The Bible teaches that Death is an Enemy that will be removed from us- at the Second Coming of Jesus.

1Corinthians 15:22-26

22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming,

24 then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.

25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.

26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

So, while it is true that Sickness and Death are NOT caused by our own *individual* Sins- spiritual Weakness; spiritual Depression; and spiritual Defeat is often both the *Cause* and/or the *Result* of our own individual Sins. And because that is true- the Antidote for that Weakness and Defeat is to *always* confess those Sins to God so we may obtain His Forgiveness.

Psalms 32:5

I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD "; And You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah.

David's son Solomon- the wisest man in the world- echoed that comforting Truth:

Proverbs 28:13

He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion.

... and God the Holy Spirit “moved” on the Apostle John to say this in **1John 1:9**,

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

So, if Sin has *contributed to* or has *resulted from* the spiritual Weakness and Defeat of a fallen believer- James teaches here that that sin **will be forgiven him** when he cries out to God for Forgiveness. And the Elders should encourage this distraught and wounded brother or sister to confess; and to help him discern his Sins; and join their Prayers for his Forgiveness. And that is an essential Element of their “Ministry of Restoration”. And this is what Paul meant when he wrote this in **Galatians 6:1:**

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

So, now we come to the *amazing* part of this Passage- the part where James says,

James 5:16-18

16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.

18 Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

Now the word, “**Therefore**” in verse 15 marks a transition in the flow of thought. It is a legal term that means: “*Since all that I have said to you earlier is true- now therefore do this...*”

Here, James turns his attention *away* from the Sins of those believers who have been defeated in the spiritual Battle and now addresses the entire Congregation as a whole- exhorting ALL believers to *continually* “**confess their sins to one another**” and not wait until those Sins drag them into the depths of utter spiritual Defeat.

James was well aware that Sin is most dangerous to an *isolated* believer. You see, our Sin *always* seeks to hide and remain secret- but God always wants Sin exposed and dealt with- in the Light of God’s Word; and in the Power of the

Holy Spirit; through the loving Fellowship of other believers. Therefore, James calls for mutual Honesty and mutual Confession as believers “**pray for one another**”.

And as I have told you- there are really only two reasons as to why Sins are *not* confessed among believers in the modern Church:

1. Pride
2. Gossip

... and both of these are sinful. Pride keeps the sinning believers from admitting that they have, in fact, sinned; while Gossip destroys the Confidence that what is confessed among believers in the Church will stay in the Church and not become the topic of the evening news.

Developing and maintaining an ongoing, open, sharing, loving, and praying Relationship with each other will help keep believers from bottoming out in their spiritual lives. Such Relationships help give the spiritual Strength that provides Victory over Sin. And they also provide godly Pressure to confess and forsake Sins before they become overwhelming to the point of total spiritual Defeat and even public Scandal.

Now James’ purpose for the mutual Prayer is so that believers may “**be healed**”. Yet the Greek word, *iaomai* does not convey *physical* Healing. For example- in **Matthew 13:15** this word had to do with a *spiritual* Healing for Israel's Sins (cf. **John 12:40; The Acts 28:27**).

FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL [*iaomai*] THEM.'

... the writer of **Hebrews** also used this same word *metaphorically* to speak of *spiritual* Restoration:

Hebrews 12:12&13

12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble,

13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that *the limb* which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed (*iaomai*).

... while Peter used it to describe the “healing” from Sin that Jesus Christ purchased for believers on the Cross.

1Peter 2:24

and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed (*iaomai*).

... James uses this word here to refer to God's Forgiveness- making the repentant believer spiritually Whole again.

Now here, at the end of verse 16, James reminds both the Elders and all genuine believers (by way of encouraging them)- that this kind of Prayer is very “**effective.**” Now the English word, “**effective**” was translated from the Greek word, (*energeoe*; Strong’s # 1754) from which our English word “*energy*” comes. So, James tells us here that the Prayer of a righteous man “**can accomplish much**”.

Now the English phrase, “**can accomplish much**” that James wrote here literally means in the original Greek:

"is very strong"

... and this tells us that *weak* Prayers come from *spiritually weak* people while *strong* Prayers come from *spiritually strong* people. And we need to understand that spiritually strong people are NOT those who are “strong” in the 21st Century American model of “strength” but those who model the characteristics found in the Bible.

So, spiritually Strong people are godly; humble; and merciful people. They are people who forgive their enemies and who refuse to enact Vengeance on those who have wronged them. Spiritually strong people are those who strive to obey Jesus- with Joy; and those, who see the Commands of the Bible- NOT as handicaps to their Desires but as paths to the fullness of their own Joy.

But we also must keep these words of James in context with what he is talking about. James is NOT talking about being spiritually Strong in a general sort of way. Neither is he talking about being spiritually Strong for the sake of being spiritually Strong. Instead, James is teaching here that the energetic Prayers of righteous people (the spiritually Strong people) are a potent Force in calling down the Power of God for restoring weak and struggling believers to robust spiritual Health. *That* is the context of James’ Teaching.

And this tells us that even if people pray- their Prayers are not automatically Good or Correct or Godly. Simply because people pray does NOT automatically mean that their Prayers are pleasing to God; or that they are in accord with God’s

Will; or that they are even Prayers that God answers. For example, back in Chapter 4- James taught us that *some* very sincere Prayers are completely ignored by God and are reflective of a diseased and sinful heart:

James 4:2&3

2 You lust and do not have; *so* you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; *so* you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.

3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

... and in **Psalm 66:18** the psalmist said,

If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear;

... and the wisest man in the world at that time said this in **Proverbs 15:8:**

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But the prayer of the upright is His delight.

... and he also said this **Proverbs 28:9:**

He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, Even his prayer is an abomination.

So, all Prayer is NOT correct Prayer. All Prayer isn't godly Prayer and so, God will simply ignore it. So, we must guard our hearts to make sure that our Prayers are in accord with God's Will and that our hearts are right with God as we pray. Being sincere is great. But being sincere is NOT enough. Why? Because the ONLY Prayers that can "avail MUCH" are the Prayers of a "Righteous Man". And a "righteous Man" prays in accord with God's Will.

And to illustrate what he meant by using the phrase, "**a righteous man**"- James wrote this in verses 17&18:

17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.

18 Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its

fruit.

Now many times when this Passage is read- people zero in on the part that says,

... he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

In other words, because it is our human nature to be attracted to “open shows of Glory”- we *emphasize* the amazing and powerful and miraculous and earthshaking Results that came to pass because the Prophet Elijah prayed. I mean, after all, Elijah appeared with Moses on the Mount when Jesus was transfigured in His Glory. And so, because of all the glorious and powerful things that happened with Elijah- we tend to forget what James said at the beginning of verse 17,

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours ...

... while the King James rendered it like this:

Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are...

Now why did James bring in Elijah at this point to use as an example of what he has been talking about since verse 13? Because most of the people that were in the Church in Jerusalem back in the 1st Century (to whom this Passage was originally written) were NOT outwardly powerful people. They weren't “connected people”. And they weren't Prophets. They were just ordinary people, who had been gifted with Salvation and who were being horribly persecuted.

Sadly, it is NOT uncommon for people to assume that the living examples given in the Bible were extra-ordinary people, who *earned* Heaven by the over-abundance of Merit and personal Righteousness that they supposedly had. For example, great care is taken by hundreds of millions of people to hold Mary, the mother of Jesus, into a place that the Bible does NOT put her: a place of having no Original Sin in her life; and of being both the “Co-Redemptrix” (with Jesus) for Salvation; and the “Mediatrix” for the Holiness and Righteousness of God's people. This wayward religious System teaches that Mary was “bodily assumed into Heaven” and is the “Dispenser” of God's Grace to the world- rather than a *Recipient* of that Grace- because of the fact that she was a lost sinner, who needed it- as the Bible teaches.

It is the manufactured and unbiblical Myths that surround the long-dead biblical characters that is the Foundation behind why this religious System makes statues of these people (even though nobody knows what they looked like) and teaches people to pray to them- seeking their Help and Guidance.

The Truth is that every single biblical character was an unworthy sinner- who was graciously saved by a sovereign Act of God's Mercy, Grace, and Love. And each one of them were very, very *ordinary* people- that God called and chose to do very *extra-ordinary* things- for one reason: to display the "Glory of God's Grace"- so that the world would wonder after God and praise Him for His marvelous Acts. And that is why the psalmist said this in **Psalm 118:22&23:**

**22 The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner stone.
23 This is the Lord's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes.**

So, to encourage the very ordinary people of the Church in Jerusalem back in the 1st Century and to encourage you and me in the Covenant of Peace Church in Gulfport, Mississippi in the 21st Century- James said,

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours ...

... in other words, Elijah was a sinner, who was NOT always on "top of his game." For example, there were times that Elijah was afraid (**1Kings 19:3**); and hungry (**1Kings 17:11**). There were even times when this great Prophet was discouraged and asked God to kill him (**1Kings 19:4; 9-14**). And these times are in the Bible to show us that God doesn't use strong and powerful people. Those who are proud of their "inner strength" and who seem to always be in the "driver's seat" are usually *rejected* by God- because those are the people who seek to rob God of His Glory.

The one, true, and living God of the Bible primarily uses the weak and the feeble people of this world because those are the people who will easily humble themselves and who will always give God the Glory. And this is a Principle that is woven throughout the entire Bible:

1Corinthians 1:26-29

**26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;
27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,
28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,**

29 so that no man may boast before God.

2Corinthians 12:9b&10

9 ... Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

Yet James is quick to teach us that when this weak, sinful, and undeserving man “**prayed earnestly**” (lit. "he prayed with prayer"), incredible things happened: James references the Old Testament and said,

... he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

So, even though Elijah was a man with a nature just like ours- his Prayers both created and ended a devastating three-and-one-half-year Drought (cf. **Luke 4:25**). And while **1Kings 17** records the Drought- James is the one who gave us the *duration* of the Drought; and linked it to the Prayers of Elijah.

Now we need to agree that the Old Testament Story of Elijah and the Drought would certainly be a strange and completely out-of-place Illustration if James had physical Illness and physical Healing in mind in this Passage. There are plenty of clear biblical Illustrations of physical Healing all through the Old Testament that James *could* have drawn from if that was what he had in mind. But the picture of rain pouring down on parched ground perfectly illustrates God's outpouring of *spiritual* Blessings on the dry and parched souls of struggling believers. And He does *both* in response to the effective Prayers of people, who have been made righteous by Faith alone in Jesus and in His finished Work.

Now what this final Passage in **James** makes clear is that both Suffering and Sin are common in the New Testament Church. Now in **The Revelation 21:3&4**- the Apostle John saw a day when that will not be true:

3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,

4 and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

... but until then- this fallen Age of great Futility and much Groaning and agonizing Waiting- dominates. And that tells us that belonging to the Covenant Family of God does not guarantee us Freedom from Suffering or Freedom from Sin. So, the Question comes up:

“How do you preserve the Unity of the Church in Spite of Suffering and Sin?”

... and that's what this Passage is about. And so, I want us all to grow in our Faith and our Commitment to pray for one another and watch God do mighty things for those who have grown weak through their Suffering. And that is what James has been talking about in verses 13-18.

But James didn't end this Epistle with a discussion about Weakness or Suffering- because Suffering is NOT our greatest Problem. Look what God the Holy Spirit “moved” on James to write in verses 19&20:

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

20 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.

This section deals with believers straying from the Truth. And what I see here are four crucial things about preserving the Unity of the Church in spite of Sin:

1. The Unity of Truth.
2. The Unity of our Vulnerability
3. The Unity of Warnings
4. The Unity of Security

1. The Unity of Truth

The point here is that there is such a thing as Truth. Absolute Truth. Objective, Propositional, Eternal Truth. And we have our Unity; our Fellowship; and our Church- *within* that Truth. In other words, with Truth- we DON'T exist.

Over the years, there have been several Efforts by several Churches on the Coast to “come together”; and “drop the barriers that divide us”; and “become one”. And I have personally been a part of several of those Efforts. I realize that the modern Church of Jesus is divided- and I *despise* that Division. I do not think that Division among genuine believers is pleasing to God. And so, I hate it and I

want that Division to end. And so, the Effort to unite us- was and is attractive to me.

Yet in spite of these great Efforts- Unity did NOT materialize. Why? Because, without exception- those efforts were NOT based on anything that had the Power to actually unite us. Beloved, there is ONLY one thing that has the ability and the Power to unite believers together- and it's NOT personalities. It isn't Relationships. The only thing that has the Power to unite believers together is- Truth- Divine, Absolute Truth.

So, we can sing all the songs we want to; and we can hold hands; and we can close our eyes and sway back and forth until Jesus comes back- but until we are willing to bow our knees; and submit ourselves to the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of the living God- there will NEVER be any real and lasting Unity.

Because since it is true- that there is Truth- there is also Error. And since there is both Truth and Error, there is a way to walk that is called, "Righteousness" and there is a way to walk that is called, "Sin". Walking- or living our daily lives- in accord with- or in submission to Divine Truth and in opposition to Error- is what "Righteousness" is. And walking or living our daily lives in opposition to Divine Truth and in submission to Error- is what "Sin" is.

And we are confronted with both Truth and Error- multiple times every day. And when God's people walk in the Truth- there is great Unity. But when we walk in Error- there is great Division and no Unity. And that is why James ends this Epistle by saying,

My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth...

... because it is possible for genuine believers to stray from the Truth.

We must understand that James is NOT warning unsaved pagans about this- he is warning believers, who are in the Church. So, for someone to say, "*I'm saved and therefore I can't stray from the Truth*" is to ignore what James (and almost every other biblical writer) says in the Holy Bible.

But because genuine Salvation *is* Eternal- James doesn't stop with the Warning. He then goes on to say,

... and one turns him back,

Because Jesus *refuses* to allow a single genuinely saved person to be lost- God will move on other saved people to "turn the straying one back". Back to what? Back to the Truth from which this one has strayed.

So, it is true to say, "*Salvation is Eternal.*" And it is also true to say, "*There exists Divine Truth*". And it is also true to say, "*Genuinely saved people love the*

Truth and strive to obey it.” And it is also true to say, “Genuine believers can stray from the Truth”.

But because Salvation is Eternal- it is also true to say, *“God will assure that another believer will help turn the straying believer back to the Truth”.* And it is also true to say, *“Because he is a genuine believer, the one who has strayed from the Truth will heed the other believer and will turn back to the Truth.”* Which means it is also true to say, *“If that person does NOT return to the Truth- he is proving that he doesn’t love the Truth and was never genuinely saved in the first place.”* All of that is true.

Please notice four key words: TRUTH, SINNER, ERROR, and WAY.

1. In verse 19 a believer is straying from the TRUTH
2. In verse 20 that straying believer is called, “a SINNER”
3. His Sin is called, “ERROR”
4. His Sin is described as his “WAY”

... 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...

... and James begins this Passage with the phrase, **“My brethren”**- meaning he is ONLY talking about the people of the Church or those who “lay claim” to be saved. So, there is Truth. And there is a way to live our daily lives that is out of sync with that Truth. And that Way is both Error and Sin.

And this is the very Foundation of the Unity of the Covenant of Peace Church. We exist because we endorse the notion that there is such a thing as Divine, Absolute Truth and that there is such a thing as Error. There is Sin and there is Righteousness. There is Good and there is Evil. There is Right and there is Wrong. And the Covenant of Peace Church exists because we have affirmed a Covenant with God and with each other to walk according to that Truth. And we have also affirmed that this Divine and Absolute Truth is found in ONLY one location: the 66 Books of the Holy Bible.

And we have also made a Covenant with God and with each other to pray for each other; and to work with each other- so that we may consciously and purposefully turn away from Error and turn to the Truth. And to forsake Sin and to embrace Holiness. And to hate Evil and to love Righteousness.

And I stress this because the single most destructive Force on earth against Christianity is the pervasive attack against the notion that there is such a thing as Absolute Divine Truth; and that Salvation REQUIRES that we *hate* Error and *love* the Truth.

In other words, our greatest Battle today (according to the Bible) is NOT a liberal President and an out- of- control Congress. It is also NOT being fought between those who say that the Bible is true and those who say that the Bible is false. No. The *main* Battle is over whether there is such a thing as True and False; and Right and Wrong; and Holy and Profane. The *real* Battle is whether these notions are true or simply antiquated ideas left over from unenlightened culturally myopic Generation that didn't even have the internet or YouTube.

Please allow me to describe two Ways that this Attack is being carried on:
1) One goes like this. modern Secularists say that Technology and Science have proven that the Bible is completely irrelevant- at best. And they say that Scripture is merely part of ancient Superstitions on a par with the Greek gods of Zeus and Hermes and Poseidon, or the animistic Belief that rivers have spirits. So, the claim that the Bible (with snakes and donkeys that talk)- has unique Authority is “relativized”- in other words, its claim to Universal Truth simply won't stand the Test of the “modern scientific Worldview.”

And one Response to this in the last 100 years in America has been to keep the Bible at the center of our cultural Life by arguing that, whether true or not, the Bible is crucial for understanding “Western Civilization”. So up until maybe 50 or 70 years ago, one could make a case for taking the Bible seriously because the University and High School Curricula all assumed the indispensable, unifying Value of “Western Civilization”- like centuries of Art and Literature and Philosophy and Moral Tradition flowing from the “biblical world” through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the modern Industrial Age, and shaping who we are in the modern, Western World.

But in the last 50 years or so alongside “Scientific Secularism” there has arisen a radical “Multi-Culturalism” that says, in effect, *"What's so special about 'Western Civilization?' It has no more claim to Value than any other Civilization."* So, this secondary Effort to defend the unique Worth of the Bible as the Foundation of Western Civilization is collapsing today as the Multi-Culturalists deconstruct any Claim at all that one Civilization or Tradition is better than another.

2) That's one Way that the “Truth Claims” of the Bible is being undermined. Another Way is this: those who oppose the Concept of Absolute Divine Truth say, with increasing frequency, that all Claims to Truth have been and are now, “politically driven”, and should be rejected, not because they are False, but because they are “Oppressive.” In other words, Truth is NOT what its defenders say it is. But rather it's a “political Weapon” by which Men oppress Women; where Whites oppress Blacks; where Western Civilization oppresses Eastern Civilization; where the Rich oppress the Poor; where Christians oppress Muslims; and where straight people oppress homosexuals; and so on.

So, the way that the Claim to Truth is attacked- is NOT by showing that it's False or distorted, but by calling it names: like “Chauvinistic”; or “Bigoted”; or “Parochial”; or “Racist”; or “Intolerant”; or “Homophobic.” And of course, there is enough misuse of Truth by people, who claim to love it- to give some Credibility to the attack. But the real Tragedy today is that thousands of power-brokers in our country endorse the attack- uncritically- without seeing that the very Foundation of civilized Life and Beauty and Goodness and Justice and Love are being swept away by this derision of the concept of Truth.

Now I dwell on this because I think nothing is undermining biblical Christianity today *more* than this attack on the existence of Truth. And if we yield to this Attack, we are saying that the Bible is no more- true; and no more- valuable than the *Communist Manifesto*, or *Hammurabi's Code*, or the *Bhagavad-Gita*, or the *Buddhist sutras*, or the *Qu-ran*, or the *Sayings of Confucius*, or an *Animist chant*.

And that is a high price to pay to be up-to-date and in step with the times. So, I want you to hear the first point in very conscious Distinction to this contemporary trend. “There is Truth!” And that Truth is rooted in God and revealed through the Bible. And there is a Way to live in accord with this Truth. And we exist as a Church on this Foundation. And we will not yield to the pressures of an all-destroying Relativism. We have made a Covenant with God and with each other to strive to live according to the Truth.

2. The Unity of Vulnerability

The point here is simply that Christians living in the New Covenant and committed to each other by formal Membership can and do sin. We are vulnerable to sinning. We are not yet perfect. Verse 19:

My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth...

...and this means that it is possible for the most- godly among us to stray.

But if that is true- what then becomes of the New Covenant Promises that God will sovereignly write the Law on our hearts (**Jeremiah 31:33**) and that He will put His Spirit within us and CAUSE us to walk in His Statutes (**Ezekiel 36:27**) and that He will continually work in us that which is pleasing in His Sight (**Hebrews 13:21**)? Does our straying from the Truth *annul* the Promises of God? Does our sinning *reject* the Sovereignty of God?

The Answer is that God does not transform His people overnight. Now He could. And we often wish that He would. But for reasons known better to Him than to us- God continues to sovereignly *allow* us to often stumble in our own

remaining Rebellion and Corruption- *probably* to show us how utterly corrupt we really are- without Him; and to make us desperate for Him.

The New Covenant Promise is that God will change us. Sovereignly. His Spirit will continually dwell within us. He is the Sanctifier. All true Virtue is His fruit- not ours. But God also has said that He does not do this instantly or overnight. And so, we remain vulnerable to sinning. And so, we must NEVER become presumptuous or proud, but constantly pray for more Grace and give ourselves to the Fight of Faith (**1Timothy 6:12; 2Timothy 4:7**) and the ongoing and purposeful Pursuit of Holiness (**Hebrews 12:14**).

3. The Unity of Warnings

What we need to see here is very sobering. The Warning here is that the Path of Sin can lead to Death without a Covering for Sin. In other words, it leads to Destruction and eternal Lostness in Hell. Verse 20 says,

... he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

James infallibly teaches here that if the sinner turns back from his slide into Sin- he WILL escape Death and he WILL be in a Relationship with Jesus Christ that covers all his Sins. But this Passage also says that IF he does NOT turn back- then he will die, and his Sins will NOT be covered. And this person WILL perish in Hell forever!

And this is utterly crucial for us to see. The New Testament writers do NOT assume that everyone in the Church is necessarily going to persevere to the End and be saved. They treat people, who have made a profession of Faith, as true Members of the Church- giving them the benefit of the doubt. James calls them all "**brethren**" in verse 19.

Yet, at the same time- James also realizes how easy it is for human beings to be deceived about themselves. So, he does NOT assume that everyone, whom he calls a brother, is in fact a brother. And so, he warns the whole Church that straying away from the Truth- into persistent Sin- proves that whatever Salvation experience that person THINKS he had- was FALSE- and his persistent Sin will lead to Death- without Forgiveness. So, the final Proof of who is a brother and who is not- is the "*Perseverance of Faith*"- NOT the "*Profession of Faith*."

James assumed exactly what the Apostle John assumed in **1John 2:19**- that some people had left the Faith and the Church without being persuaded to turn back. And John said,

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.

So, John and James recognize that not everyone who says, "Lord, Lord," will enter the Kingdom (**Matthew 7:21**). Therefore, even in the New Testament Church- like the Covenant of Peace Church- we must warn each other about the tremendous Danger and Deceitfulness of Sin, and how it can become so attractive that it pulls a person beyond the point of no return. This is the Unity of Warning that we need from each other again and again.

There are far too many who play with Sin and presume upon Grace, and do not realize that they can make shipwreck of their lives and die without Forgiveness, even though they claimed to be Christians and belonged outwardly to a New Testament Church.

The Unity of Security

Our Security in the New Covenant rests in God's sovereign "keeping Power."

Philippians 1:6

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

1Corinthians 1:8

who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jude 24

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy,

Romans 8:29&30

29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

In the New Covenant- our Security is in God and NOT in our own Performance. Our Security is the New Covenant Commitment of God to

sovereignly produce in us- the Faith and the Obedience and the Perseverance we need to endure to the End and be saved. That is our Security.

But what James makes clear is that God does His preserving Work through human Means. Look at the wording of **James 5:20** once more:

... he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

What's the subject of the verb, "**will save**"? Who is the "saver" in this verse? It's the Church member- who goes after the straying brother.

... he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

... it's like what Paul said in **1Corinthians 9:22**:

To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.

Eternal Security is absolutely Certain for God's elect. But Eternal Security is a "Community Project." There is no such thing anywhere in the New Testament where believers keep themselves- by themselves. That is simply another manifestation of the Pride of 21st Century Man. Let me illustrate by talking about something that I don't do- fish. When a fish is caught- who or what caught it? Did the hook catch it, or did the bait? And what about the line, and the pole? What about the fisherman? But we can't stop there because what about the current in the sea that led the fish to the vicinity of the fisherman? But what about the boss back at work that told the man to take the day off and go fishing? So, who or what caught the fish? The answer is: God used all of the above.

And so, it is in the New Testament Church. New Covenant Security is NOT an individual job. It surely depends on God, but God uses Means. So, it depends on God using the Means- like going after each other when we are straying into Sin.

Paul showed the combination of God's sovereign saving Power and his use of human Means in **2Timothy 2:24-26**:

24 The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged,

25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth,

26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

So, God uses Means to keep us Secure. And so, the measure of our Security and our Joy in this Church will be the degree to which we use the “Means of Grace” to turn each other back from straying and keep each other Safe in the Love of God that covers the multitude of our Sins.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.

