

James Ends His Letter ~ With An Encouragement ~ To Seek Out And Bring Back ~ Wayward Believers.

NIV ^{19a} My brothers and sisters, ~ ^{19b} if one of you should wander from the truth ~ ^{19c} and someone should bring that person back, ~ ^{20a} remember this: ~ ^{20b} Whoever turns a sinner ~ from the error of their way will ~ save them from death ~ and cover over a multitude of sins.

But before we unpack these 2 vv, ~ we need ~ to cover a number of preliminary matters.

▶▶5 ~ to be exact.

▶▶Need to do this ~ in order ~ to make sure ~ we get a good understanding ~ of what James is saying. ⇔⇔ **Technical**

The 1st ~ Preliminary Matter.

While James' underlying intent ~ is to mobilize a rescue mission to erring believers, ~ there is no direct appeal to action.

▶▶To be precise, ~ he does not ~ directly exhort us ~ to seek out and bring back the wayward.

▶▶Rather, ~ he motivates us by giving us ~ the incentive ~ for doing so.

▷▷And i.e., ~ the results ~ of such a mission.

▶▶Namely, ~ if effective, ~ it will achieve 2 things.

▷▷1st, ~ it will ~ save the erring brother/sister from death. **1/12**

▷▷ And 2nd, ~ it will bring about ~ the forgiveness ~ of many sins.

Now The 2nd Preliminary Matter.

Notice that ~ restoration ~ is the goal, ~~ and not ~ condemnation.

▶▶ Paul expresses the same thought in Gal. 6: ~ 1a (NET).

▷▷ Brothers and sisters, ~~ if a person ~ [i.e., ~ if another believer] ~ is discovered in some sin, ~ you who are spiritual ~ restore such a person ~ in a spirit of gentleness.

▶▶ You who are spiritual.

▷▷ I.e., ~ believers who walk by the Spirit, ~ and who are mature in the faith.

▶▶ In a spirit ~ of gentleness.

▷▷ Gentleness of attitude and behavior, ~~ in contrast with harshness ~~ in one's dealings with others.

↪↪ *gentleness, ~~ humility, ~~ courtesy, ~~ considerateness, ~~ meekness.*

The 3rd Preliminary Matter.

James does not give us any insight ~ as to how ~ to mount the rescue mission.

▶▶ But, ~ coming on the heels of his section on prayer, ~~ I think that we can logically deduce ~~ that prayer ~~ is a major component.

▶▶ Meaning, ~ of course ~~ sincere, serious prayer, ~~ expressed ~ with utter confidence in God. 2/12

▶▶ Utter confidence in God ~ meaning 2 things.

▷▷ 1st, ~ that God will heed our prayer, ~ and ~ grant it ~ or ~ only in his superior wisdom ~ deny it.

▷▷ And 2nd, ~ that God ~ is who he says he is, ~ that he ~ is generous ~ and ~ that he ~ gives without any ~ negative, ~ critical, ~ or discouraging ~ response.

Furthermore, ~ James 5: ~ 19-20 ~ does not give instructions on what to do ~ in case the believer ~ does not return and repent.

▶▶ However, ~ instructions for that ~ can be found in ~ e.g., ~ Matt. 18: ~ 15-20; ~ 1 Cor. 5: ~ 1-5; ~ and ~ Titus 3: ~ 9-11.

And, ~ in Gal. 6: ~ 1b ~ Paul provides a warning for the rescuer ~ that is also absent from James 5.

▶▶ (NIV) But watch yourselves, ~ or you also ~ may be tempted.

The 4th Preliminary Matter.

Some translations confusing.

▶▶ NIV has a very good translation.

▷▷ NIV ^{19a} My brothers and sisters, ~ ^{19b} if one of you should wander from the truth ~ ^{19c} and someone should bring that person back, ~ ^{20a} remember this: ~ ^{20b} Whoever turns a sinner ~ from the error of their way will ~ save them from death ~ and cover over a multitude of sins. 3/12

And Now The 5th And Final Preliminary Matter.

More time on this one ~ than the other preliminary matters.

Restoring wayward Christians ~ or ~ saving non-Christians?

▶▶ I firmly believe ~ that James is talking about ~ restoring wayward believers.

▷▷ For at least ~ 4 reasons.

Reason #1, ~~ the phrases ~~ Brothers and sisters ~~ and ~~ if one of you.

▶▶ These phrases ~ mark this concluding topic ~~ as expressed ~ to believers ~ about believers.

▷▷ Idea: ~~~ If one of you, ~ brothers and sisters, ~ should wander from the truth ~ [or, ~ from God].

Reason #2, ~~ keep in mind ~ James' overall purpose for writing.

▶▶ And i.e., ~ to instill ~ correct thinking ~ and right behavior ~ in believers.

▷▷ Even in address to rich unbelievers ~ in 5: ~ 1-6

Reason #3, ~ wd sinner ~ is used one other time in James ~ and refers to believers.

▶▶ 4: ~ 8c, ~ Cleanse your hands, ~ you sinners.

▷▷ Recall, ~ wanted believers ~ to get rid of ~ all sinful habits ~ & ~ live godly lives. 4/12

▷▷Consequently, ~ not far-fetched ~ to suppose ~ James is also using it this way ~ here in ~ 5: ~ 19-20.

↳↳That is to say, ~ to refer to ~ a sinning believer.

Reason #4, ~ the only other time James uses the word ~ death, ~ it refers to believers.

▶▶And i.e. ~ 1: ~ 13-15.

▷▷I.e., ~ his discussion ~ of the trajectory of sin ~ in a believer's life.

▷▷There ~ death ~ referred ~ to consequences suffered ~ in this life.

▷▷Metaphorically, ~ sin can lead ~ to all kinds of death.

↳↳Unchecked sin ~ can kill your marriage. ~~~ It can kill ~ your career. ~~~ It can kill ~ your relationships with others.

↳↳Unchecked sin ~ can kill your testimony. ~~~ It will kill ~ your spiritual life. ~~~ It will kill ~ your spiritual ministry.

▶▶Plus, ~ according to the wider context of NT ~ literally ~ sin can lead to physical death.

▶▶Most likely ~ James is basically also using death ~ in relation to believers in ~ 5: ~ 19-20.

▶▶Eternal spiritual death ~ cannot be meant then.

▷▷Consequently it means ~~ metaphorical ~ and/or physical ~ death. 5/12

As a result of these reasons, ~ it is best ~ to understand James ~ as talking about ~ restoring a wayward believer to fellowship.

Having Laid A Foundation ~ With These 5 Preliminary Matters, ~ Let's Unpack ~ James 5: ~ 19-20.

For context, ~ revisit the vv as a whole.

▶▶ **NIV** ^{19a} My brothers and sisters, ~ ^{19b} if one of you should wander from the truth ~ ^{19c} and someone should bring that person back, ~ ^{20a} remember this: ~ ^{20b} Whoever turns a sinner ~ from the error of their way will ~ save them from death ~ and cover over a multitude of sins.

James Begins In Vs 19a, ~ With The Familiar ~ (NIV) My Brothers And Sisters.

This phrase ~ marks this concluding topic ~ as expressed ~ with loving warmth and sympathetic concern.

▶▶ Again, ~ James has ~ our spiritual welfare ~ at heart.

▶▶ He wants us ~ to grow and succeed spiritually.

▶▶ His harsh words in places ~ are to be looked at ~ as acts of love.

▶▶ As Solomon tells us in Proverbs, ~ we can trust a friend ~ who corrects us.

▷▷ But the kisses from an enemy ~ are nothing ~ but lies (Prov. 27). **6/12**

In Vs 19b (NIV), ~ James Begins With A ~ Hypothetical, ~ But Quite Possible, ~ Scenario.

If one of you, ~ brothers and sisters, ~ should wander from the truth.

▶▶ Most likely ~ James has in mind here ~ believers wandering ~ away from God ~ and into ~ sin and/or doctrinal error.

▷▷ This fits theologically w/ other texts ~ about confronting and restoring believers ~ who have fallen into sin or error.

▷▷ There are many ~ narrative accounts of this ~ throughout Scripture.

↳↳ E.g., ~ 2 Sam. 12

▶▶ In his hypothetical ~ but quite possible ~ scenario, ~ James is not ~ talking about ~ an accidental or unconscious ~ departure from the truth.

▷▷ In a sense ~ one might stray ~ away from his knowledge of mathematics or science ~ through forgetfulness.

▷▷ But James is speaking of ~ knowing the good ~ but failing to do it.

▷▷ It is sin ~ to know what you ought to do ~ and then not do it.

▶▶ Additionally, ~ this seems to be ~ a serious departure ~ from the faith, ~ not ~ an occasional ~ slip into sin.

James Continues In Vs 19c (NIV).

(NIV) And someone should bring that person back. 7/12

Vb for ~ should bring back ~ refers here ~ to a ~ turning back to God ~ from whom ~ one has strayed.

▶▶ Jesus, ~ Lk. 22: ~ 31-32 (NIV).

▷▷(NIV) ³¹ "Simon, ~ Simon, ~ Satan has asked ~ to sift all of you ~ as wheat. ~ ~ ³² But I have prayed for you, ~ Simon, ~ that your faith ~ may not fail. ~ ~ And when you have turned back, ~ strengthen your brothers.

Notice, ~ James is implying ~ that we have a responsibility ~ to do what we can ~ to restore ~ an erring believer to fellowship.

▶▶ And not ~ to let them slip through the cracks.

▶▶ To answer Cain's question, ~ am I my brother's keeper?

▷▷ Yes, ~ we are responsible ~ to look after and care ~ for our fellow believers.

▶▶ Phil. 2:4 (CSB), ~ Everyone ~ [i.e., ~ every believer] ~ should look out ~ not only ~ for his own interests, ~ but also ~ for the interests of others ~ [i.e., ~ brothers & sisters].

▷▷ Here's Paul's point.

↪↪ We are not ~ to make our needs and concerns ~ a priority ~ to the exclusion ~ of our fellow believers' needs and concerns.

↪↪ Our sphere of concern ~ should be broader ~ than ourselves.

→→ And it should include ~ the needs and concerns ~ of our brothers and sisters ~ in Christ.

▷▷ Including ~ doing all we can ~ to restore ~ an erring believer to fellowship. 8/12

In Vs 20a (NIV), ~ James Calls Our Attention ~ To Remember ~ The Results Of A Successful Restoration.

(NIV) Remember this.

▶▶ IOW, ~ don't ~ forget this.

▶▶ Keep in mind, ~ James says, ~ what the results will be ~ when a wayward believer ~ is restored ~ to fellowship with God.

In Vs 20b (NIV), ~ James Notes ~ Two Results ~ Of A Successful Rescue Mission.

This ~ is a statement ~ of assurance.

▶▶ That is to say, ~ we can be sure ~ of these results ~ when a wandering believer ~ turns back to God.

▶▶ (NIV) ~~~ Whoever ~ turns a sinner ~ from the error of their way ~ will ~ ① ~ save them from death ~ and ~ ② ~ cover over a multitude of sins.

▶▶ This is great encouragement. ~~~ And we need to tell them. ~~~ They can be restored!

The 1st ~ Assured Result ~ Of A Successful Rescue Mission.

The rescuer will save them ~ [i.e., ~ the wayward believer] ~ from death.

▶▶ James 1: ~ 13-15, ~ is central ~ to understanding ~ what is meant here.

▷▷ Touched on this earlier this a.m. ~~~ Here we'll ~ review and expand on it. 9/12

▶▶ In ~ 1: ~ 13-15 ~ James informs us ~ that believers ~ are susceptible to temptation, ~ which leads ~ to sin and finally death.

▶▶ Death ~ in 1: ~ 15 ~ as we know, ~ does not mean ~ eternal separation from God.

▶▶ What it does mean ~ is the loss of everything ~ that one might think of ~ with regard to life.

▷▷ I.e., ~ fellowship with God, ~ meaningful relationships with others, ~ fruitful labor, ~ joy, ~ health and strength, ~ peace, ~ and ~ even physical life.

▶▶ That a Christian can experience this kind of death ~ even while still physically living ~ is clear from Rom. ~ 6 - 8.

▶▶ Notice Paul's instructions ~ to the Corinthian church ~ regarding the sinning believer.

▷▷ 1 Cor. 5: ~ 5 (NIV), ~ Hand this man over to Satan ~ for the destruction of the flesh, ~ so that ~ his spirit may be saved ~ on the day of the Lord.

▶▶ Moreover, ~ Acts 5: ~ 1-11 ~ and ~ 1 Cor. 11: ~ 30 ~ make clear ~ that a Christian ~ may experience physical death as well, ~ as a result of sin.

▷▷ And in his 1st epistle, ~ John says that ~ There is sin ~ that leads to death.

My . . . , ~ our sin will ~ not result ~ in eternal separation from God.

▶▶ And that ~ is only because ~ of our faith in Jesus.

▶▶ However, ~ in this life ~ sinning can result in ~ discipline, ~ suffering, ~ pain, ~ distancing ourselves from God, ~ quenching his Spirit, ~ and even death. 10/12

The 2nd Assured Result ~ Of A Successful Rescue Mission.

A multitude ~ of the rescued believer's sins ~ will be covered.

▶▶ I.e., ~ removed from sight.

There is a likely connection here ~ to Ps. 32: ~ 1.

▶▶ Blessed is the one ~ whose transgression is forgiven, ~ whose sin is covered.

▷▷ Also, ~~ Oh, what joy ~ for those ~ whose disobedience ~ is forgiven, ~ whose sin ~ is put out of sight!

▶▶ Ps. 32: ~ 3-4 (NLT) ~ describe the experience ~ of physical suffering ~ on the part of David ~ who has walked away from the Lord.

▷▷ Agony he was in when sin unconfessed.

▷▷ When I refused to confess my sin, ~~ my body wasted away, ~ and I groaned all day long. ~~ Day and night ~ your hand of discipline ~ was heavy on me. ~~ My strength evaporated ~ like water ~ in the summer heat.

▶▶ And the psalm also describes ~~ the blessings of experiencing full and free forgiveness ~ for all the sins that have been committed.

▶▶ David exclaims, ~ Oh, ~ what joy ~ for those ~~ whose disobedience ~ is forgiven, ~ whose sin ~ is put out of sight!

This ~ is the promise of grace ~ that James says is available ~~ to those ~ who have walked away from the Lord. 11/12

▶▶Prov. 28:13 (NIV), ~~~ Whoever ~ conceals their sins ~ does not prosper, ~~ but the one ~ who confesses and renounces them ~ finds mercy.

▶▶Ps. 32: ~ 5 (NIV), ~~~ Then I acknowledged my sin to you ~~ and did not cover up my iniquity. ~~~ I said, ~~ "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." ~~~ And you forgave ~ the guilt ~ of my sin.

It is traditionally thought ~ that ~ Ps. 32 ~ is connected ~ to David's sin with Bathsheba.

▶▶This adds further depth ~ to the parallel between James 5: ~ 20 and Ps. 32: ~ 1.

▶▶David wandered away from the Lord ~ through the sins ~ of adultery and murder.

▶▶The prophet Nathan was the one ~ who turned him back.

▶▶This is what James is urging us believers to do.

▷▷He wants us ~ to care enough about wayward believers ~ to help rescue them ~~ from sin and death.

The use of ~ multitude, ~ in vs 20b, ~ lets the us know the following

▶▶No matter how many sins ~ have been committed in walking away from the Lord, ~~ they are all ~ taken away ~ when one turns back to God.

▶▶And that ~ is good news!

And with that ~ bit of good news, ~ we close our study ~ of James' letter. 12/12