

Message #20**James 5:16-20**

There are some powerful reasons for going to church. There are great blessings and benefits we gain from being at the corporate gatherings. God things, solid things happen. For example:

- 1) We go to church to worship God. That certainly is a worthy motive - James 1:26-27.
- 2) We go to church to be taught the Word of God. That is a fantastic motive - James 1:21.
- 3) We go to church to enjoy the fellowship of God's people - Galatians 2:9.
- 4) We go to church to obey a command of God - Hebrews 10:25.
- 5) We go to church to give our offerings - II Cor. 8-9.
- 6) We go to church in order to use various spiritual gifts - I Corinthians 12.

But let me suggest that most people who go to church have never thought about the final theme that James brings up. **We go to church to get victory over sin.** The theme that James brings up is this: **when people go to church, the church has a responsibility to help each other get victory over sin.**

Part of the responsibility that we have to each other and church is to help one another have victory over sin. Now don't tell me, or tell James you don't have some sin struggle because that is a lie. That is not just my opinion; that is what the Apostle John said, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us" (I John 1:8). So we all have some struggles and we all need more victory in the struggles and the church is to be a place that helps that.

The believers in James' day lived in a tough world. Many of them had been chased out of their homes and had been scattered for their faith in Jesus Christ (James 1:1). Most of those believers were poor (James 1:9-11).

When these believers went to church they saw people who were at different levels of success. Some had more than others. As a result, there was some envy and jealousy and some backbiting.

What James wanted was the believers who understand that the church has a responsibility to see to it that every one of us deals with sin. We must see sin in our own lives and get rid of it. That must happen if we are going to develop in a way. What James says is this:

WE HAVE A MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY TO HELP EACH OTHER HAVE VICTORY OVER SIN AND TO HELP EACH OTHER DEVELOP IN RIGHTEOUSNESS AND TRUTH.

The church is to be a place where people work together so we develop in righteousness. The church is like a spiritual hospital. It is like a spiritual care center. We are supposed to help each other get better. We are to help each other gain victory over sin and develop in righteousness.

Now as James ends this epistle, he brings out three responsibilities that we have:

RESPONSIBILITY #1 – We have the responsibility to confess sins to each other. **5:16a**

This verse negates the idea of some priestly confessional because this teaches that confessions are to be made between brothers and sisters in Christ and not to a priest.

The word “confess” is an imperative command and it is a middle voice verb. So what this indicates is that we each have been commanded by God with this responsibility and each person in and of himself is responsible for the action.

More than likely the confession is to be made to the person another person has wronged. The middle voice verb indicates that this is an individual responsibility in and of ourselves. **So I understand this to mean if we have sinned against another brother or sister in Christ, we have a responsibility to confess it.**

Now I do not think James had in mind opening up major dark closets of your life and graphically giving explicit details about your sin or struggle. This is not some exhortation to share all your dirty laundry in some form of bizarre ecclesiastical exhibitionism. As I understand it we are talking here about specific sin connected to another in the family of God.

In fact, there is an article “the” before the noun sins, meaning this is discussing specific sins and not just any sins that have ever been committed. The pronoun another means another of the same kind. So James is discussing specific sins that need to be confessed to a brother or sister in Christ.

Years ago there was a student at GRSBM who used to thrive on bringing out gross details of his life and he would do that in prayer. We would bow for prayer and when it came his turn to pray he would start praying for things he was thinking about that the rest of us had no desire to know. That is not what James was after.

James wanted the church to be a place of honesty. He wanted honest interaction that is willing to confess struggles and failures. In fact, if one did that and then others prayed, there could be a real healing of the problem (5:16b).

Now this is a critical point. **Until one is willing to admit the sin and confess it first and foremost to God, there will never be any real victory.**

RESPONSIBILITY #2 – We have the responsibility to pray for each other. **5:16b**

Once someone has decided to confess to the people of God some struggle, the people of God have a responsibility to pray for that person.

James taught that this was one reason why some people do not get victory over something in their own lives; they do not admit we need people praying for us.

We all struggle but very few are willing to admit it and share the struggle. One reason why is because some people cannot be trusted to take the information and pray. Many take the information and gossip.

When people confess sin, the responsibility of the flock is to pray for the person. They are not to gossip or condemn; they are to pray.

Any person in the congregation should be able to tell another brother or sister about their struggle and not have that person say, “You heathen.” We should pray for each other and pray that one may be healed.

George Peters, in his book “A Theology of Church Growth” writes:

“Continual prayer was one of the marks of the early church. Prayer was more than a recital of formulas or a practice of rituals. It was the expression of a kinship relationship, dependence, anticipation, confidence and assurance, not only in the existence of God, but in His ability to change the course of history and to direct the ways of the people. As the early church permitted itself to be led into a life of prayer, the believers experienced marvelous answers to prayer. God did not fail His people. Prayer does accomplish things because it is one of God’s main methods of accomplishing His blessed purpose.”

If you are having a real struggle in your life, first pray yourself (**5:13**) and second, get the people of God praying for you and you will be healed. God mends through prayer.

Now in **verses 16-18** to show how powerful prayer is, James uses an example from I Kings 17. It is the story of Elijah. Elijah was a man like us. He was not a perfect man. He was a sinner. He got depressed and at times he wanted to give up (I Kings 19:4). But Elijah was a man who honestly talked to God and he earnestly prayed to God.

Elijah saw that the children of Israel were getting involved in Baal worship. He went to Ahab the King and said that there would be a major drought in the land. The purpose of God answering the prayer was to get Israel back on the right track (I Kings 17:1). The idea of drought for rebellion came out of the Levitical law (Lev. 26:18). Elijah prayed and the drought came for 3 ½ years. This was a form of judgment prayer (I Kings 18:17-40). After that 3 ½ years later, when the prophets of Baal had been destroyed (I Kings 18:40), the rains came again (I Kings 18:44-46). **One man praying did this—the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.**

Now if one man can pray and make such a worldwide national impact, think of what can happen when many people pray for us, specifically that we have victory over some sin.

RESPONSIBILITY #3 – We have the responsibility to turn each other back to the things of God.

Now notice carefully from **verse 19** who it is we are to convert or turn around: “brethren.” The word “turn” shows up two times in these two verses. It means to turn someone around.

What James is saying is we have a responsibility as a church to turn brothers and sisters around when they have erred from the truth. This is true when it comes to doctrinal error or lifestyle error. We have a responsibility to turn them back to the truth.

In the church if you err from the truth, it is our job to try and turn you around. We have a responsibility to try to turn you back to the Scriptures so your life lines up with the Scriptures.

When a person is in the church and starts wandering off into sinful areas, it is our responsibility to try and turn each other back to the ways of the Word of God.

Now how do we actually confront someone and turn them around? Well we are to confront them lovingly; we are to stand for truth firmly and we are to pray for them unceasingly.

How did Elijah get the nation to realize we need to turn back to God? He prayed that a drought would occur.

There is a place to pray that God will send a drought to someone’s life. There is a place to pray that God will send a drought to someone until they turn from their ways. If one man like Elijah could influence a nation, think about what a church can do to influence an individual.

James concludes by saying that if you do get a believer who is sinning to turn from his ways, you have saved his soul from death and you have hidden a multitude of sins.

What James means is that you will save his spiritual life and his physical life.

Now this is all part of grace life and grace works. James believed that grace faith worked itself out in a life that demonstrates grace. The issues that he has discussed have covered a whole plethora of things. Grace life is demonstrated by the way we cope with trials and temptations. It is demonstrated by welcoming everyone and not showing partiality. Grace life is certainly demonstrated by what we say with our mouths and speech. Grace life is demonstrated by what we do with our money and as this text says, it is demonstrated by what we do about sin.

This is one practical book and hopefully God has used the book of James to challenge us and change us.