

JAMES 5:13-20 | WAITING PATIENTLY FOR THE KINGDOM, PART 2

vv. 13-15 – see session 14

VERSE 16 –

I am not convinced that there is a measurable difference between **faults** (v. 16) and **sins** (v. 15). Good communication seeks to use synonymous terms rather than identical terms. The Greek word used here is παράπτωμα [paraptoma], which is sometimes called a *trespass*. Both Ephesians 2:1 and Colossians 2:13 use *sins* and *trespasses* in the same verse in such a way that it would be difficult to argue a different meaning between the two words.

In addition to confession, the recipients were instructed to **pray one for another, that ye may be healed**. Grammar alone does not tell us whether the healing is connected to both confession *and* prayer, or to prayer alone. Most commentators put these together, and thus conclude that the sicknesses were related to mistreatment of their brethren. Since most commentators are not coming from a right division perspective, they often contend that when Christians do not get along, this lack of harmony will lead to physical illness. Passages like 1 Corinthians 11:30 are often used as support. Personally, I think the connection is dubious and James is simply bringing two instructions for those living in an Apostolic era and not for those living in the post-Apostolic age of grace.

James concludes this instruction with a doctrinal statement followed by an example in verses 17-18. The doctrinal statement itself is that **The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much**. Of course, if we apply this directly to the Christian life with no right-division, then we begin an endless pursuit to discover what an **effectual fervent prayer** really is. Because so many of our prayers have *not* been answered, we may conclude that our prayers must not be of the **effectual fervent** variety.

The words **effectual fervent** are translated from a single Greek word, ἐνεργέω [energeo], a verb in the present participle. The verb itself is an *energy* word which could be translated as *being energized*, in its participial form. What is an *energized* prayer? Could this be a reference to the power of the Spirit, energizing the Jewish believers in a Pentecostal manner? If not, what is it? And if this is what is under consideration, is such *Pentecostal power* still at work today? And since **effectual fervent** is a verb and not a noun, is there any way that we can “energize” our prayer? If such energy is dependent upon Pentecostal power, and the Spirit is not working in the Pentecostal way, can ANY prayer be effectual today?

This approach is offensive to many, if not most, because they take a *continuationist* view of Pentecostal power. My view is that such power was given for the Messianic believers in Israel in order to present the Messiah and His kingdom to their fellow countrymen. It involved manifestations that were unmistakable and powerful. However, when Israel was set aside for the age of grace, these manifestations ceased. Along with that, the promise of James 5:16 ceased as well, for it is based on Pentecostal realities.

This Pentecostal power was seen by a **certain man, called Simon** in Samaria (Acts 8:9). Simon witnessed the *energizing* Pentecostal power of the Spirit and offered the apostles money (Acts 8:18) asking them to **Give me also this power** (Acts 8:19). Such was the visible and *effectual* nature of Pentecostal power.

While believers in the age of grace can certainly be **righteous**, both positionally and behaviorally, I contend that **effectual fervent prayer** is unavailable during this dispensation and will resume when God begins to deal directly with Israel once again, after the rapture.

VERSES 17-18 –

James now uses an Old Testament illustration of **Elias** (Elijah, using the Greek rather than Hebrew spelling). Though Elijah did not have Pentecostal power per se, such power was really nothing more than an extension of *prophetic power*. With such power, a man **subject to like passions** can have miraculous power in prayer.

Elijah **prayed earnestly**. This phrase has, like the phrase of verse 16, led many on the *wild-goose chase* of building a formula for *earnest* prayer. In actuality, we have nothing more than a rhetorical device called a polyptoton (pronounced *poly-toe-ton*), which is “A rhetorical figure involving the repetition of a word in different cases or inflections within the same sentence.”¹ The Young’s Literal Translation translates as “with prayer he did pray.” There is no adjective describing the prayer as *earnest*, and therefore there is no need to diagnose certain prayers as earnest and others lacking this characteristic.

The example given is taken from 1 Kings 17.

VERSES 19-20 -

From beginning to end, James is a book that *belongs only to the Jewish era*. What wild terminological inexactitudes a preacher would need to give to force these verses to fit the current era. Under what stretch of the meaning of words could these words mean anything other than what they plainly say? And they plainly say that one who turns back a sinner from his behavior saves that sinner from death, and hides a **multitude of sins** (presumably their own). This is undeniably a salvation based on personal righteousness (i.e.: *works*). It simply does not fit in the age of grace.

And it is no problem whatsoever that it does not fit in our dispensation, save for those who insist on putting James in our dispensation. Those who practice a literal reading of scripture will avoid the problem beginning with a literal interpretation of James 1:1. But since (as we have observed) James is rejected as literal from the very first verse, every other verse becomes tremendously problematic.

As before, it is easy to find commentaries that deny the clarity of these verses. For example, the *New American Commentary* states, “The converting of a sinner in no sense supplies some kind of compensatory merit for the one who is instrumental in the conversion. Nor is the amended life the basis of one’s withstanding the judgment of the Lord.”² Such is true in the age of grace, but not true in the age

¹ "polyptoton, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2022. Web. 13 October 2022.

² Kurt A. Richardson, *James*, vol. 36, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 245–246.

of verse 20. With unmitigated gall, writers like Richardson simply say, “that Scripture doesn’t say what that Scripture clearly says.”

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Having now studied the epistle of James verse-by-verse from beginning to end, I am more convinced than ever that **rightly dividing the word of truth** (2 Tim. 2:15) is the answer to *every single problem* that has been brought forth concerning the epistle’s contradictions with Paul. The means of overcoming these real issues is to simply *divide* James into the Jewish dispensation and Paul into that which follows. Such division, of course, is also clearly taught by Paul himself in Ephesians 3 and elsewhere.

Sadly, I am more convinced than ever that the “standard fare” of Christendom, whether from Catholic, Reformed, evangelical, and even classic dispensationalism is simply so filled with the errors of *wrong division* that it is practically worthless for Christian growth and understanding. As we have seen in this study, the commentaries consistently reject a literal interpretation in favor of the allegorical. They do this, not because it is merited by context, but because a literal interpretation does not fit within their preconceived notions. As for me, I prefer to follow the instruction of right division and leave my notions behind. These notions were most often built upon evangelical group-think in the first place, parroted by respected church leaders so many times that they became accepted as truth, but containing little.

I suppose *a few* of those who have followed this study will be convinced, for there are always some open to plain logic. Yet I know that most, and especially those of the so-called Clergy, will reject the ideas immediately. It seems that those most responsible for interpreting the Scriptures are most fearful of doing so if doing so literally would jeopardize their comfort, or their careers. I, along with those who accept the method we call *right division*, will be sidelined (and perhaps called *heretical*) for our views. But may we take this with grace, praying that Christendom will come to a greater love for the truth than its current love for its doctrinal statements and positions.
