

Practical Day-To-Day Christianity

[As shown in the letter written by James]

Part 5

James 5:1-3 [NIV] *“Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. **Your wealth has rotted**, and moths have eaten your clothes. **Your gold and silver are corroded**. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days.”*

In the first six verses of this chapter James proclaims the worthlessness of riches, **not** the worthlessness of the rich.

Today’s money will be worthless when Jesus Christ returns, and for most today this could be our first conscious realisation after their resurrection from the dead.

What we should be accumulating at this time is the kind of treasures that we can take through physical death into the eternal Kingdom of God.

Money is **not** the problem, all Christians need money to live and support their families.

Churches need money to spread the gospel message and educate, those whom God calls at this time, in Christian living.

1 Timothy 6:10 [NIV] *“For **the love of money** is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”*

It is the love of money that is the root of the problem.

It is very easy for a rich person to love their wealth, not being able to even imagine what it would be like not to be rich.

James is using very vivid, carefully chosen and pictorial words to drive home his point.

Fine garments were the outward sign of wealth, and were very splendid, but still food for moths!!

Gold and silver do **not** rust and the word James uses means to rust clean through.

The point James is making is that even what is apparently indestructible are doomed to decay and dissolution.

This rust of gold and silver is a proof of the impermanence and the ultimate valuelessness of all earthly things.

It is James’ conviction that to concentrate on material things is not only to concentrate on a decaying and corpse-like delusion, it is to concentrate on self-produced destruction and eternal disaster.

The inspired Christian Bible, does **not** condemn wealth as such, but there is no book which more strenuously insists on the responsibility of wealth and on the perils which encompass a person, who is abundantly blessed with the world’s goods.

Luke 18:24-25 [NIV] *“Jesus looked at him and said, **“How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!** Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”*

Because money represents power, authority and success, it is often difficult for wealthy people to realise their need and their powerlessness to save themselves. The rich in talent or intelligence suffer the same difficulty.

Unless God reaches down into their lives, they will **not** come to Him, this may even mean taking away their riches for a period of time to test their true commitment to God.

Job 13:15 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“Let Him [God] kill me if He will; I have no other hope.”*

As part of the testing of Job, God took away in one day all the wealth of Job, but this did not shake Job’s trust in the Creator God.

James 5:4 [NIV] *“Look! **The wages you failed to pay the workmen** who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.”*

Many rich people have become rich by withholding a just wage for those who work for them.

The day labourer in Palestine always lived on the edge of starvation. There was no such thing as unemployment pay or Social Services.

This is why there were many laws in scripture insisting on prompt payment of the hired labourer.

Leviticus 19:13 [NIV] *“Do not defraud your neighbour or rob him. **“Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight.”**”*

Deuteronomy 24:14-15 [NIV] *“Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns. Pay him his wages each day before sunset, because he is poor and is counting on it. Otherwise he may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin.”*

Malachi 3:5 [NIV] *“So I will come near to you for **judgment**. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, **against those who defraud labourers of their wages**, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me,” says the LORD Almighty.”*

Jeremiah 22:13 [NIV] *“Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, **making his countrymen work for nothing**, not paying them for their labour.”*

Many laws in the Christian Bible are nothing less than the charter for the labourer.

James 5:5 [NIV] *“You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.”*

Those who have become wealthy at the expense of others, mostly use the riches in the same selfish manner.

They are totally devoid of any thought of duty to their fellow human beings who are in need.

What is the ultimate end for people who live this way?

They are like beasts who eat to their heart’s content on the very day of their approaching slaughter, unconscious of the fact it is near.

Selfish, rich people cannot imagine that their lifestyle could ever come to an end.

Luke 18:18-23 [NIV] *“A certain ruler asked him, “Good teacher, **what must I do to inherit eternal life?**” “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No-one is good — except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false*

*testimony, honour your father and mother.’” “All these I have kept since I was a boy,” he said. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When he heard this, he became very sad, because **he was a man of great wealth.**”*

This young rich man could **not** imagine life now without his wealth, his question was ‘how can I continue this lifestyle for ever?’

James 5:6 [Revised Standard Version] *“You have condemned, **you have killed the righteous man; he does not resist you.**”*

This could be referring to Jesus Christ the Son of Man.

Acts 3:14 [NIV] *“You disowned the **Holy and Righteous One** and asked that a murderer be released to you.”*

Same word used for righteousness.

Acts 7:52 [NIV] *“Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of **the Righteous One**. And now **you have betrayed and murdered him**”*

Stephen reminds the Jews that they not only slew the prophets foretelling the coming of the righteous one but also the Righteous One Himself.

1 Peter 2:21-23 [NIV] *“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” **When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.**”*

Jesus offered **no** resistance to those who murdered Him.

It may well be that James is saying that in their oppression of the poor and the righteous man, the selfish rich have crucified Jesus Christ again.

Every hurt inflicted on Christ’s poor people is another wound on Christ’s tortured body.

To live selfishly is to pierce Christ again with the spear thrust that caused the totality of His blood to be spilt for our salvation.

James 5:7-8 [NIV] *“Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, **be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.**”*

The early church lived in the expectation of the immediate Second Coming of Jesus Christ, and James exhorts his people to wait with patience the few years which remain.

The autumn rain was essential for the seed to germinate and the spring rain was needed for the crop to mature.

The farmer must wait patiently for the crops to grow but there are many things he can do to ensure a good harvest.

In the same way we must wait patiently for Christ’s return, we cannot make Him return before the appointed time.

But while we wait there is much work for us to do to advance God’s Kingdom.

Both the farmer and the Christian must live by faith looking forward to a future reward for their labour.

Don't live as if Christ the judge of our reward will never come. Work faithfully to build His Kingdom [family of created children of God], for Christ the King will come when the time is just right.

What does the New Testament tell us about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ this time to rule as King of Kings?

1 No human knows the time of Christ's return

Matthew 24:36 [NIV] *“No-one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”*

So secret is this time that even Jesus the Son of Man did **not** know the date.

Mark 13:32 [NIV] *“No-one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”*

From the basic fact one thing is clear, human speculation about the time of the Second Coming is not only useless, it is actively blasphemous.

2 The Second Coming will be sudden

Matthew 24:27, 37-39 [NIV] *“For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.” ... “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.”*

1 Thessalonians 5:1-2 [NIV] *“Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.”*

2 Peter 3:10 [NIV] *“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”*

The Second Coming is not something for which we can get ready when it comes, we must be ready right now for His coming.

What we watch for is our personal preparation for Christ's return, to be without unconfessed sins, controlling our human passions, so that our prayers are not hindered, and love deeply our fellow human beings.

3 Long delay must not cause us to despair or become forgetful

2 Peter 3:3-4 [NIV] *“First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.”*

God does not see time as human beings see time for He lives outside the influence of time, He lives in eternity.

God has never changed nor abandoned His original plan for human beings [**Genesis 1:26**].

4 We must use the time given to prepare for Christ's Coming

1 Thessalonians 5:23 [NIV] *“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

We must seek to be blameless in body and spirit.

1 Thessalonians 3:13 [NIV] *“May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be **blameless and holy** in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.”*

Constantly in the presence of God through prayer and study after cleansing from sin by the blood sacrifice of Jesus.

Romans 13:11-14 [NIV] *“And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us **put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light**. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, **clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.**”*

Only if we are doing this will we greet the coming King of Kings with joy and without shame.

5 When Christ returns we must be found in fellowship with other Christians

1 Peter 4:7-10 [NIV] *“The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, **love each other deeply**, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer **hospitality** to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to **serve others**, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.”*

Peter uses the thought of the Second Coming to encourage all of us to love one another and spend time together in fellowship.

Hebrews 10:23-25 [NIV] *“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards **love and good deeds**. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”*

“The day” always refers to the return of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 4:5 [NIV] *“Let your **gentleness** be evident to all. The Lord is near.”*

“Gentleness” is the translation of the Greek word “epieikēs” meaning a spirit which is more ready to offer forgiveness than it is to demand justice.

The New Testament as a whole urges us to never go to sleep, or end a day, with an unhealed breach between ourselves and another person, lest in the night Christ should return.

6 John urges us to abide in Christ

1 John 2:28 [NIV] *“And now, dear children, **continue in him**, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.”*

Surely the best preparation for meeting Jesus Christ at His return is to live close to Him every day, through worship, prayer and study of His Words and lifestyle.

The great truth behind the pictures of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is that the creation of human beings is **not** purposeless, aimless or planless, for we are all going toward one divine event the Kingdom of God on Earth in its fullness.

James 5:10-11 [NIV] *“Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.”*

It is always comforting to feel that others have gone through the trials which we have to face in life.

Matthew 24:13 [NIV] *“but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.”*

Jesus Himself reminded us that it would be the person who endured to the end who would be blessed. Jesus then proved this by His own physical endurance of a very painful life as a human being, right to its end.

We have heard of the saying *“the patience of Job”*, but patience is far too passive a word.

There is a sense in which Job was anything but patient. Job passionately resented what had happened to him.

Job passionately questioned the conventional and orthodox arguments of his so-called friends.

Job passionately agonised over the terrible thought that God might have forgotten and forsaken him.

But inspite of his torrent of questions, inspite of agonising thoughts that tore at his heart, Job never lost faith in God.

Job 13:15 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“Let Him [God] kill me if He will; I have no other hope.”*

Job 19:25 [NIV] *“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.”*

Job had total trust in what Jesus Christ would do in the future for him personally and all of humanity.

The very greatness of Job lies in the fact that in spite of everything that tore at his heart, he never lost faith in God.

Job struggled, questioned and sometimes even defied God, but his trust in God was never extinguished.

The word translated *“perseverance”* is *“hupohonē”* which describes **not** passive patience but a gallant spirit that can breast the tides of doubt, sorrow and disaster and still hold on and come out with faith still stronger on the other side.

Job 42:12 [NIV] *“The Lord blessed the latter part of Job’s life more than the first...”*

There are moments in our lives when we think that God has forgotten us, but if we cling on to the remnants of faith we too will see how very kind and merciful God really is.

James 5:12 [NIV] *“Above all, my brothers, do not swear, not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your “Yes” be yes, and your “No”, no, or you will be condemned.”*

Here James is repeating the teaching of Jesus Christ Himself [**Matthew 5:33-37**].

James is not thinking of what we call bad language, He is referring to the taking an oath, a promise, or an undertaking.

This was a teaching which was very necessary in the days of the early Christian Church which was greatly influenced by the Jewish background where there was an extraordinary amount of oath-taking.

One practice which made a mockery of the whole process was that if an oath including the name of God or God's temple it was binding because God was directly involved.

If however the oath did **not** include God or the temple in its contents, such an oath was **not** binding.

As Jesus and James point out, in the honest society no oath is needed, only when people cannot be trusted to tell the truth do they have to be put under oath.

In fact if you require an oath to tell the truth then you are already branded as untrustworthy.

By avoiding exaggeration, lies, half-truths or omissions of the truth we can become known as a trustworthy person.

Matthew 12:36-37 [NIV] *“But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”*

The view of the Christian Bible is that every word is spoken in the presence of God and we will be accountable for its effect.

James 5:13 [NIV] *“Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.”*

The early Church was a singing church and a praying church.

1 Corinthians 14:15 [NIV] *“So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind.”*

When we sing praises to God we should always think about the meaning of the words, just as we should always think about the words we use in prayer.

Matthew 6:7 [Living Bible] *“Don't recite the same prayer over and over as the heathen do, who think prayers are answered only by repeating them again and again.”*

Matthew 6:5-8 [Message Bible] *“When you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people [those praying in public to get the applause of the crowd] making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat? Here's what I want you to do, find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense His Grace [and presence]. The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They're full of formulas and programmes and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don't fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and He knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply.”*

James 5:14-15 [NIV] *“Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.”*

Another great characteristic of the early church was its attitude towards healing, physical and spiritual. For many centuries the Church constantly used anointing as a means of healing the physically sick.

The Church has always cared for her sick, and in the Church there has always resided the gift of healing.

1 Corinthians 12:4, 7, 9 [NIV] *“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.” ... “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the **common good.**” ... “to another faith by the same Spirit, to another **gifts of healing** by that one Spirit,”*

The gift of healing given by the Holy Spirit to some is right there alongside faith and preaching. Note all these gifts were for the “*common good.*”

We worship the same God today!

Olive oil, a symbol of the Holy Spirit, can be used to assist healing of physical wounds [**Luke 10:30-37**] and was also used as the spiritual anointing of kings [**1 Samuel 16:1-13**].

Therefore olive oil can represent both physical and spiritual spheres of life.

Christians would **not** separate the physical and the spiritual, for Jesus Christ is Lord over both our body and our spirit.

The prayer of faith does not refer to the faith of the person who is sick, but the faith of the people praying.

Faith does not heal, God does, but our prayers are part of God’s healing process.

That is why God desires our prayers of faith before intervening to heal the person.

James 5:16 [NIV] *“Therefore **confess your sins to each other** and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”*

There is the idea that sickness is due to sin, in many cases this can be true on a physical level.

The person who is knowingly sinning does **not** have peace of mind, and such stress can have drastic effects on our physical body.

There are two barriers that sin erects, between us and God, but also between us and other human beings because of the effect our sin has on their lives.

Both these barriers are broken down by confessing.

1 John 1:8-9 [NIV] *“If we **claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves** and the truth is not in us. **If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.**”*

Confessing breaks through the sin barrier between us and God.

Matthew 18:15 [NIV] *“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.”*

Confessing wrongs will strengthen friendships when we humbly accept our mistakes.

To confess our personal sins against God, not those against the other person, in many cases can cause more harm than good, if we share them with other people.

To do this we need to have total confidence that the other person involved will **not** pass on this knowledge to others. This principle must be used with great wisdom, but when we can safely apply it, we will find it a powerful prod on us to repent.

Prayer is the channel through which strength and the Grace of God are brought to bear on the problems, troubles and ills of life.

James 5:17-18 [NIV] *“Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.”*

Elijah is an example of what power prayer can have to change circumstances, when in harmony with God’s Will.

Matthew 6:31-33 [NIV] *“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. **But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**”*

When our mind and our prayers are focussed on the extending of God’s Kingdom and our becoming a part of it, all our needs will be supplied by our loving and caring Heavenly Father.

James 5:19-20 [NIV] *“My brothers, **if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.**”*

Christian truth is something from which we can wander.

If we are only convinced of the truth in an intellectual way and not allowing it to influence every aspect of our lives, we can very easily stray in our mind and then in our actions.

2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 [NIV] *“The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because **they refused to love the truth** and so be saved.”*

Truth is something we must love.

Galatians 5:7 [NIV] *“You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from **obeying the truth?**”*

Truth is something we have to obey.

Ephesians 4:14-15 [NIV] *“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, **speaking the truth in love**, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.”*

Truth must be spoken in a loving way.

John 18:37 [NIV] *“You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, **to testify to the truth.** Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”*

If we are to follow the example of Jesus Christ we have to be a witness of the truth, truth being expressed in the way we live.

1 John 3:18-19 [NIV] *“Dear children, let us not **love** with words or tongue but **with actions and in truth.** This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence”*

Truth is something that is manifested by a life of loving others.

John 8:31-32 [NIV] *“To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and **the truth will set you free.**”*

Truth is something that sets us free from the deception of Satan and his society.

John 16:13 [NIV] *“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”*

Truth is something that is a gift from the Holy Spirit.

John 3:21 [NIV] *“But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”*

Truth is something we live by.

We need to make it the standard by which we judge the actions we take in every aspect of our life.

Truth is **not** just an intellectual exercise, **not** a matter of knowledge, argument or debate.

Truth is a way of life.

As we can see, truth is something that is so all encompassing we can easily drift away from it.

Philippians 2:3-4 [NIV] *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. **Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.**”*

If we are so concerned with the spiritual condition of other people as well as our own, helping one who has strayed from the truth will cause God to cover and forgive our own sins.

To save another person is the sure way to save ourselves.

1 Timothy 4:16 [NIV] *“Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”*

Paul’s advice to Timothy.

Daniel 12:3 [NIV] *“Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and **those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.**”*

The highest honour God can give is going to those who lead others to God, for such a person does nothing less than share in the work of Jesus Christ the Saviour of humanity.