

Two Cautions for Times of Suffering

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[0 : 00] All right, so just some preliminary things here before we really get into the text itself.

! So there's some similarities between this passage and the passage that comes before it!
Similarities between the subject in verses 9-12, and the subject of verses 7-8, and that subject being what?

Patience, patience in suffering. But there's also something different, and that is now the response we have to suffering is inside, pertains to the body of Christ, how we respond to one another within the body of Christ.

So that'll be the subject. And then, of course, the tongue is involved here. This is James using the tongue again. I mean, you can find it so many places throughout the book.

In fact, you could really tie all those together, and you have pretty much an exhaustive treatment of the problem of the tongue, and how it is used wrongly, although there are some references to how the tongue can be used rightly.

[1 : 23] And so the tongue is involved. Do not grumble. Do not swear. All right, so we'll divide this text into two parts, and I'm going to call them cautions. Two cautions for times of suffering.

We might even use the word warnings. Really, it's stronger than just a caution. In fact, let's just go ahead and change that. You can just cross that out, cautions, and put warnings. All right?

Two warnings for times of suffering. Here's the first one. A warning against disharmonious speech. By the way, I looked it up.

That is a real word, okay? My wife is always accusing me of making up words just so I can have an alliteration, you know. But I didn't make this up.

It's a real word. Disharmonious speech. And this is interesting. In fact, both of these, both points here are kind of interesting, or the texts that support them are interesting.

[2 : 25] That somehow this is connected, how this could be connected with suffering and how we respond to suffering. And this first one is how we use the tongue to bring disharmony within the body of Christ solely because we are suffering and not responding to it correctly.

And so that's what we're going to look at in these first few verses of the text. And we'll divide this into several parts. First, the admonition. There's an admonition that James gives first of all.

And what is that admonition? Verse 9, do not grumble against one another, brethren. That's an admonition. He's admonishing them. He's speaking directly to them.

The brothers and the sisters. So you know he's talking about those inside the body. The body of Christ. And so he says, don't grumble. Do not grumble against one another.

Now let's just kind of pick that apart a little bit. I said that James' focus in this particular passage as it relates to suffering is how we respond to it within the church.

[3 : 35] Not how we respond to people outside the church, those who may be bringing persecution, those who are causing suffering. But how we respond to those within the body of Christ.

So one another brethren, in that first phrase in verse 9, that tells us that James is addressing a problem within the church. Something going on between us, between brothers and sisters.

He's not only speaking to believers here, but he's speaking to believers who are not acting right toward other believers. Alright, so that's part of the admonition.

Admonition. And then what about this word grumble? Grumble means to groan within oneself. It's kind of an interesting word.

Translated differently in different versions of the Bible. If you have a New American Standard, I think the word complain is there. King James actually translates it with a word that doesn't seem to relate here or doesn't seem to be the same as grumbling.

[4 : 45] That is to hold a grudge or to grudge someone. It's kind of an antiquated old use of the word grudge. Grudge. But this is the idea.

That a person would hold a grudge against someone because, well, and I want to let the cat out of the bag. We'll get to it here in a minute. But just because I'm suffering and he isn't.

So I hold a grudge against them. Because they're not suffering like I am. And so grumble, that's what it means. It means to groan within oneself.

And by the way, it doesn't always come out in verbal speech. Remember, I've said this a number of times. James deals with the tongue.

But it doesn't necessarily mean that it's always audible language that he's talking about. We can speak things in our own heart. Things that we never would say out loud.

[5 : 44] And so that's why I say that the tongue is so connected to the heart. So, you know, your heart speaks within yourself. And so quite often the idea here is that I am grumbling inside.

You know, I am moaning. In fact, some I think. Matter of fact, there may be one version. I don't remember if it was the ESV or something else that is not used often.

But the word moaning, groaning, is used as part of the translation. So, yes, it can involve and often does involve overt, outward, audible words of grumbling.

But it can also include and maybe even more often includes things that are just said inside.

Regardless, the problem is there. Whether you say it out loud or you're saying it within yourself.

And so James is addressing this kind of grumbling. So in this context, do not complain. This is what he's saying. Do not complain. Do not criticize.

[6 : 53] Do not blame another believer in the church. That's the admonition. I'm not, other than one little thing I said a moment ago, I've not made the connection with suffering and patience yet.

We'll make that in a minute. But this is just the plain admonition that he gives. Do not grumble against one another, brethren. And actually we could say, based upon other places in Scripture, that we don't have any business grumbling against anyone else in the body of Christ for any reason. But now he's going to get very specialized here. A certain kind of grumbling that takes place within the church that is connected to suffering, to affliction.

All right, now, so the admonition. Now second, the explanation. The explanation. That is, in this sense, what explains this grumbling?

We're not to grumble against one another. What is the explanation for the grumbling that does exist within the body of Christ?

[8 : 02] Well, since the context is suffering, remember that's the context here. Patience, specifically patience and suffering. But the context of suffering, then the following would describe some typical scenarios.

And I've got those printed for you there. First of all, here's a scenario. Imagine a member of the first century church being arrested because of his or her commitment to Christ, while another member is not arrested.

Now, the one who is arrested, maybe we could even extend that to the family of the one who's been arrested for his faith or her faith, they could be tempted, would be tempted to be, to kind of hold a grudge against, you know, a fellow member who was not arrested.

You know, I was arrested, but you weren't. And so there's the temptation to grumble about that, to resent that, to complain against that. That they're not suffering at an equal level as I am suffering.

This is what was going on in the church that James is writing to. Here's another scenario. Imagine a wife whose husband has been violently martyred. And this happened in the early church.

[9 : 24] Happens still today. Not so much in America, but in many other countries. But imagine a wife, her husband has been martyred. And imagine that wife now trying to rejoice with the other wives in the church whose husband's lives have been spared.

You know, to kind of rejoice. You know, my husband's dead now. He was killed because of his faith. My friend Susie over here, her husband's still living. He was spared.

How can I rejoice with her about her husband still living? And enter into and share in her happiness that her husband was not martyred, but mine was martyred.

You see what we're getting at here. It was the temptation to moan inside. Oh, it's not fair. I mean, others have not suffered as I've suffered.

It's not fair that I'm suffering this way. And this is what James is addressing. Here's another scenario. Just as typical, maybe even more typical in the early church.

[10 : 35] Imagine a Christian family's business. All right, you've got a little business, a little shop there in Jerusalem. You're a Christian. And as soon as you became a Christian, suddenly your customers stopped shopping at your little store.

Stopped buying your goods. This happened to many, many Christians. That's why many of them were in such need. Suddenly their livelihood came to an end. Either they were working and were fired or they have a business and no one was coming and buying their product or their services. So you've got a Christian family. Their business has gone belly up. They can't make a profit. They can't make a living because of their Christianity.

While at the same time, another believer in the church, his business or her business is prospering. So mine is, I'm filing for bankruptcy.

I don't have any more money. My business is gone. But my good friend over here, member of my church, his business is flourishing. And so there could be some grumbling, you know, about that.

[11 : 44] It's just not fair. Either grumbling to God or grumbling openly to others in the church. Last scenario, imagine a committed Christian in the church suffering extreme physical affliction.

That would kind of take this into a realm that maybe is more probable in our kind of world. And that is, here's a believer, very committed to Christ, walking with Christ, living for Christ.

You know, just serving Him. Just maybe what we would call a stellar example of a committed Christian.

And yet, now suffering extreme physical affliction. While another somewhat less committed believer is enjoying perfect health. You kind of picture that scenario and the feeling the one might have toward the other.

Maybe never verbalized, but just felt inside. I'm telling you, this is a very real scenario in our day. We could substitute, you know, a physical ailment.

[12 : 54] We could substitute with just economic prosperity. And the disparity that some might see within the body of Christ. The very wealthy, the very, very poor.

And it's just not fair that I'm poor and you're so wealthy. So there can be this kind of grumbling that can take place within the body of Christ. And this is what James is warning against.

And so he's saying, if we put this in a nutshell, don't look at someone else and complain because they are not suffering as you are.

Don't try to involve others in your misery. I mean, you think we would normally think of it in those terms? You know, I'm afflicted and it's just not fair that I, you know, that others are not afflicted. So I want to share my affliction. I want to share, you know, my misery with others. And James says, this is just not right. Third, the condemnation.

[13 : 58] There's a condemnation here. Verse 9, latter part of it, lest you be condemned. So don't do this. Don't grumble against one another, brethren. Lest you be condemned.

Behold, the judge is standing at the door. That's pretty strong words. So what do we make of it? To make of it grumbling or complaining, criticizing, blaming, holding a grudge, whatever.

Grumbling toward others is a form of judgment. It's judgment. I mean, if I'm grumbling inside or outside because, you know, so-and-so in my church, you know, not near as committed as I am, at least I think.

And yet, I struggle. I just struggle at every point, physically and other ways. And I look at my brother there in the church, and he's not near as committed as I am.

And yet, everything seems to be so good with him. Everything seems to be working. He's not, I mean, he's not suffering in any way. What am I doing? I'm judging my brother.

[15 : 15] First, judging his heart and commitment to the Lord, and judging that things aren't fair between us. It's a form of judgment.

Grumbling toward another fellow believer is a form of judgment. We blame others for something they did not do. We wrongly judge others less spiritual.

We judge them less spiritual as the reason why they are not suffering as we are. So, they're not suffering like me, so that means they must not be as spiritual as I am. And all kinds of thoughts that can enter into our minds.

Or we criticize others for not ministering to our needs. This is a big one in the church. So, I'm hurting. And suffering.

And it just seems to me that nobody really cares about me. You know, those deacons. They don't really care about me. Not helping me. You know, or, you know, I thought, oh, so and so in my

church really loved me.

[16:23] And they're just not there for me. So, you know, we just get out of sorts with our brothers and sisters because we're judging, judging their hearts, judging their intent.

The result of this kind of grumbling is the condemnation of the Lord. Now, we're not talking about condemnation in the sense of eternal judgment here.

But God condemns this kind of thought process. This kind of activity. This kind of use of the tongue. He condemns this.

Judge not. Remember the Bible says, judge not and you shall not be judged. Condemn not and you shall not be condemned. The real judge, the only one who can judge the heart of a person, he's coming.

And that's what we're to understand about the last part of verse 9. He is standing at the door and he will judge rightly. So, we don't judge. We don't grumble, which is a form of judgment.

[17:34] God is the judge. And he's the one that judges rightly. And he's coming. In fact, he's even at the door. And this is an interesting kind of imagery, isn't it?

And here's the idea. The imminent return of Christ. When I say imminent, I mean at any time, at any point in time, he could be coming. He could be coming right now.

There's nothing that has to happen first. There's no, not even really any advance warning. He's coming. And he's coming imminent.

His imminent coming is imminent. That in itself should guard us from this kind of disharmonious speech. It ought to guard us from a whole lot of things.

In fact, the Bible even says that the fact that Christ is coming at any time, that knowledge of that should purify our hearts and lives.

[18:29] But think of it in terms of this that's going on, this grumbling and moaning and complaining and holding grudges against fellow believers because you're suffering, you perceive more than they're suffering, and it's just not fair.

All that kind of business that's going on. The fact that the judge is at the door, it means he's coming through that door at any moment, ought to curtail this kind of activity in our lives.

I just thought of this scenario. Have you ever found yourself saying something ugly about another person when suddenly you look up and notice he or she is right there at the door, standing at the door?

You know, you'd like to just kind of take those words back that you spoke, but you can't take them. Or how many times have you just been right on the verge of saying something about someone, and then that someone, you're looking at someone is there.

That's the kind of scenario that James is portraying here. Giving us an image of that we ought not to be grumbling toward a fellow believer because God, the Lord Jesus, right at the door, he's coming at any moment.

[19:39] And we ought to always be living in that reality that he may come at any moment. And by the way, that, of course, would apply to any kind of sinful or wicked behavior.

Fourth, the inspiration. He also gives us some inspiration against this kind of speech. And the inspiration comes from the prophets.

Verse 10, my brethren, take the prophets as an example. All right, so if you're struggling and, you know, you're getting into the temptation to complain and criticize and blame and grumble against your brothers and sisters, then let me just remind you about the prophets.

Take them as an example. This is kind of interesting. The Old Testament prophets used their tongues to build up God's people, not tear them down.

Now, you know, you might say, well, you know, some of the prophets said some pretty tough things of condemnation and judgment. But even that is designed to build up.

[20:49] And God gave them the words to speak. And they spoke in the name of the Lord. Not speaking on their own. They're not, you know, grumbling toward the people of God because of something in their own hearts.

God is the one. He's the supreme judge. He's the one that can accurately say what people need to hear. But the prophets themselves, they serve the Lord.

And they use their tongue to further His cause. Use their tongue to speak His words. And that's how we ought to use our tongue. So this is a good example. The prophets inspire us in three ways.

First, there is a patience required in suffering. That's what the prophets teach us. There is a patience. Patience is required in suffering.

James said, take the prophets as an example of suffering and patience. A very specific example he's talking about here. Very specific. Use them as an example for what?

[21 : 52] Suffering and patience. Suffering and patience. And what's the implication? That suffering and patience must go together. You can't have suffering and, I mean, you don't really have any choice about the suffering.

Well, I guess you could say that some suffering we bring upon ourselves because of our own decisions. But suffering in the general sense is something that comes into our lives.

But when it comes, there must also be patience. So patience and suffering must go together. And we learn that from the prophets. Take the prophets as an example, James said.

Example of what? Suffering and patience. The connection of suffering and patience. Two, or second, there is a prize received in suffering.

Indeed, we count them blessed to endure. We count them blessed who are patient. You've heard of the perseverance of Job?

[22 : 57] You have, haven't you? I mean, if there's any kind of word that we would associate with Job, it would be perseverance. The perseverance of Job.

In fact, that's even become a colloquialism that we use. Perseverance of Job. And see the end.

Now, this is what you need to pay attention to. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and see the end or the outcome intended by the Lord.

How Job suffered tremendously. I mean, think about how much he suffered. You know enough about the book of Job to know that he lost his family. He lost his livestock.

He even lost his health. Think of the suffering of Job. Probably more than any of us will ever suffer. But we not only see that, but we also see the end or the outcome intended by the Lord.

And this is a great statement. That is, that all that happened to Job was a part of God's purpose.

And we don't necessarily like to associate suffering with the purpose of God.

[24 : 03] And yet we must. Because it's clearly taught in Scripture. And so when we see, we see his suffering, but we also see the outcome of it.

What happened in the end. And all that being a part of God's purpose. Third, there is a person revealed in suffering.

And this is also taught us through the life of Job. The latter part of verse 11, the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. Job's blessing, you see, was more than just restoration.

All right, Job lost nearly everything, right? You know the story. Lost it all. And then in the end, it was all restored to him. That's not the end of the lesson.

Not the end of the blessing. That was a blessing, certainly. But the blessing was the revelation. Not the restoration, but the revelation. The revelation.

[25 : 07] What was revealed to Job as a result of his suffering. And Job articulated it this way in Job 42.5. I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear.

He said, I've heard all about you. I know you in that sense. I know what your word says about you. And I know what your prophets have said about you. I know you by the hearing of the ear. But now my eye sees you.

That is, now I really know you. I see you. You've been revealed to me. And how was God revealed to Job? Through his suffering. Through his suffering. So the prize revealed in suffering is not just the restoration.

Because, quite frankly, what we suffer in this life will not necessarily be restored to us in this life. What we lose in this life will not necessarily, in fact, usually is not restored in this life.

So we don't make a comparison with Job in our lives in this sense. But we can make a very clear comparison between Job's life and our life and the result of his suffering and the result of our suffering.

[26 : 15] That will happen every time if we respond right. And that is that we'll see God more clearly. See Him more clearly. Know Him better. And that's exactly what happened to Job.

All right. The last part, we'll just about finish. A warning against dishonest speech. And this is related to what James has been talking about in verses 9 through 11.

This speech within the body of Christ. It's related. It's difficult to make the connection. But it is connected. But it goes far beyond just the issue of grumbling, using the tongue in that sense.

But the idea here is what we speak. And the honesty of what we say. Verse 12. But above all, my brethren, do not swear either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your yes be yes and your no, no, lest you fall into judgment. That's an interesting passage of Scripture.

[27 : 31] What is he not talking about? Well, he's not talking about Christians taking an oath in a court of law. There's some who've come to that interpretation. And so they won't take oaths in court because it's against their religion, against their beliefs.

But that's not what James is talking about. Jesus, by the way, allowed himself to be put under oath in his trial, even though it was a mock trial and a travesty of a trial.

He allowed himself to be put under oath before the Sanhedrin. And you can check that reference out in Matthew 26, 63. James also is not dealing directly with the subject of cursing or swearing in our kind of common speech or vernacular.

You know what I'm talking about. People use coarse words, vulgar words, swearing, cursing, taking the name of the Lord in vain, taking Jesus' name in vain, God's name in vain.

You know what I'm talking about? Cursing and swearing. Even though we can make a clear case about that to prohibit that from Scripture, we certainly can make a very strong case as it relates to taking the name of the Lord in vain.

[28 : 56] And so, though he's not dealing with that here directly, indirectly the teaching of this verse can apply to that, especially when the cursing involves the name of the Lord.

And specifically that means to take his name lightly. To take it in a dishonoring way. Dishonoring in the name of the Lord.

So what is he talking about? Well, the short answer is James is addressing the issue of swearing oaths with the tongue.

Making strong statements, strong oaths with the tongue, but having no heart intention to keep it. That is, speaking beyond where your heart is.

Even speaking in a hypocritical way to say, I will, or this is true, or I believe this, and yet not really believe that in your heart.

[29 : 57] And so your yes is not really yes. Your no's are not really no's. It's the difference between what you're saying and what you really mean. What you really believe in the heart.

This is what he's addressing here in this passage. It was, though, a common practice among the Pharisees particularly.

They're the ones that kind of got this started. To swear an oath by something sacred. Whether it was swear by heaven or swear by the temple.

They would use all kinds of sacred things to make, even swear by Jerusalem. By the holy city. And the idea was that, you know, you can be sure I'm telling the truth because I'm swearing by something sacred.

Heaven. Temple. Jerusalem. Maybe even swearing by God himself. And so this was a very common practice. And the idea was that somehow this would guarantee that the oath would not be broken.

[31 : 09] And yet, it didn't work out that way, typically. And Jesus, by the way, condemned that in Matthew chapter 5. I want to read that passage.

I meant to put it in your notes. But you've got the reference mentioned there. You can look at it some other time. But, and by the way, when I start reading this, it's going to become clear that James, really almost verbatim at some points, quoted this particular thing that Jesus said.

Now, James knew Jesus. Didn't he? Didn't he know him pretty closely? Well, he was his half-brother. And Matthew, of course, who wrote the Gospel of Matthew, knew Jesus, heard him say these things.

So both of these men, Matthew, James, heard Jesus say what he said in this passage. And probably heard him say it a number of times. But in chapter 5, starting with verse 34.

But I say to you, do not swear at all. Well, let me back up to verse 33. This kind of sets the stage. Again, you have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.

[32 : 24] But I say to you, do not swear at all, neither by heaven, for it is God's throne. Nor by the earth, for it is his footstool. Nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king.

Translation, it all belongs to God. All right? You can swear by it. It's all his. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. Most of us like to keep making it black, but it's not working out for me. I guess we could dye. A lot of people do dye their hair. A lot of men. Any men in here dye your hair? You wouldn't even tell me. Well, you know I don't. By the way, I had a good pastor friend of mine several years ago. A young man. I think he may have been in his upper 30s at the time. But he turned gray really quick. Gray, almost white. Well, silver. Really a gorgeous kind of color. He said he was walking through Walmart. Gorgeous? Is it all right to say that? [33 : 26] Guys? Anyway. Evidently, someone thought it was gorgeous, because he was walking through Walmart in the kind of the area where they sell shampoos and such. And this lady stopped him and said, I just love the color of your hair.

What shampoo or what hair coloring do you use to make it look like that? And she was serious. He said, I just, this is natural. Well, anyway. Jesus said, you can't change the color of your hair. You can't make it white or black. But let your yes be yes and your no, no. For whatever is more than these is from the evil one. So, it's clear that Jesus is condemning this notion or even kind of practice that if you want to prove that what you're saying, what you promise to do, what you swear is real and you're going to live up to it, then swear by something greater than yourself. Swear by heaven itself. And Jesus condemned that practice. So, this is not what James is wanting us to get when we look at the context here.

The apostle Peter, probably the best example of what I think James is talking about. When it comes to oaths, having no real reality in the heart. [34 : 50] Matthew 26, of course, it's carried, I think, covered in maybe all four Gospels. Maybe it's just three. Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

I don't know if John covered the, you know, the denials of Peter. His great denials. But here's what Peter swore to, is the oaths that he pronounced before Jesus' arrest. Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you. A strong oath. And then, after Jesus' arrest, he denied with an oath.

That's what the Bible says in Matthew 26. He denied with an oath. That doesn't say what he swore by. But he denied with an oath, I do not know the man.

Now, there's a stark difference between those two things. Here, he's making a swearing and oath that even if I have to go to die, I think one of the other Gospels says that Peter says, even if I have to go to prison, I'll go to prison, I'll even die for you.

[35 : 51] I will never deny you. Jesus said, you know, you're going to deny me three times before the cock crows. And that's exactly what he did. And at one point, he even made an oath.

In fact, it even says he cursed. I do not know the man. There's the difference between the yes and the yes. The one yes and the other yes. The first yes comes through the lips, but the other yes is what's really in the heart.

And so, here's, I think, the meaning of the last part of verse 12. Let your outer yes, that is what you speak with your tongue, be the yes that is truly an inner yes, what you have committed to in your heart.

You don't have to swear by anything to add credence to it or add some force to your oath or what you have promised to do, let your yes be yes.

That is, both match. What you speak and what you have in your heart must be the same. Must be the same. And people ought to know that about you, by the way.

[37 : 02] That you have that reputation. That if you say yes, or you say you're going to do a certain thing, you can be sure, people will be sure that you will do what you say.

And if it's no, then it's no. And people shouldn't question that. You should have that reputation.