

James 5 Exegetical Notes

The Test of Riches - James 5:1-6
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Test 10 - Riches

James tenth test is the test of riches. Riches, along with the tongue, are the two most accurate indicators of a person's spiritual character. In the Bible, riches are never condemned, only those riches that are gained at the expense of others are condemned, as well as the love of riches is condemned.

Jesus and Money

When our Lord was upon earth, he taught many truths using parables. It is interesting to note that the majority of Christ's parables had to do with money and riches. Surely this is not just a coincidence.

1. The parable of the sower. Those that fall into thorny soil are those that are choked by the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches.
2. Kingdom parable of the coin lost in the house.
3. The widow and the two mites.
4. The Parable of the 5, 2, and 1 talents.
5. The Sermon on the Mount.
6. The parable of the rich fool.
7. The story of the Rich Man and Lazarus.
8. The parable of the slothful servant.

Some Passages on Riches and Wealth

Proverbs 11:4 Riches profit not in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivereth from death.

Proverbs 11:28 He that trusteth in his riches shall fall; but the righteous shall flourish as a branch.

Proverbs 22:16 He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich, shall surely come to want.

Proverbs 23:5 Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.

Proverbs 27:24 For riches are not forever; and doth the crown endure to every generation.

Ecclesiastes 5:13-15 There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. But these riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand. As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight saith the Lord.

- 1** Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.
- 2** Your riches are corrupted, and your garments motheaten.

James warns the rich, and I believe it is the rich who have no place for God in their lives, of the miseries that will come to them. In this life they may have plenty, but in the next they will be destitute. James hits every source of wealth known to men at that time. In those times, riches invariably were found in one of the following:

1. Gold and silver (silver really means money)
2. Garments (many people only had one set of garments)
3. Land

James points is that earthly riches are fleeting. Garments become motheaten and eventually become useless. Gold and Silver will rust away if not lose their value due to inflation. Land belongs to the Lord of Hosts. Riches in this life are not stable, they will always vanish away.

- 3** Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.

This verse gives illumination on one aspect of God's judgment for sin, that of "confirmation in sin". The idea is this, if one continuously lives in sin and continuously rejects God's grace then at some point God will "confirm" that person in their sin. In other words, God will give them up to an ungodly lifestyle. The sobering fact in all this is that in reality God is "fattening" them up for the slaughter of judgment. Those who place their faith in riches will find those very same riches letting them down in the day of judgment, and in fact standing as a witness against them.

This is a heavy concept but it is supported in Scripture. If we look at Pharaoh in Exodus we find that Pharaoh hardened his heart, Pharaoh hardened his heart, Pharaoh hardened his heart, then God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Pharaoh drifted beyond the point of God's grace and all God could do at that point was to let Pharaoh persist in his godless lifestyle and thereby increase the severity of the judgment to come.

Consider Romans 1. We find that God revealed himself but men did not like to retain God in their minds. Because they persisted in their sins, God gave them over to uncleanness, God gave them up to vile affections, and finally, God gave them over to a reprobate mind. At that point they drifted beyond God's grace.

The truly fleeting character of riches as far as eternity is concerned is found in 2 Peter 3:10-11 where we read, *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burned up. (11) Seeing then that these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness."*

4 Behold, the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.

This passage gives light on one of the sources of the wealth of the wicked, that of fraud. As believers we should never defraud someone of anything that we owe them. We should be quick to pay our debts.

In the times of the New Testament, life was lived on a subsistence level, that is, life was lived on a day to day basis. One worked all day for the food for that single day. Because of this, the law of God laid down some principles to insure fair treatment of the common laborer.

Deuteronomy 24:14-15 That shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in they land within thy gates. At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the Lord, and it be sin unto thee.

Leviticus 19:13 Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbor, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.

Proverbs 3:27-28 Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Say not unto thy neighbor, Go, and come again, and to morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee.

Jeremiah 22:13 Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbor's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work.

We see that God is set against those that defraud their neighbors and cheat them even for a night. The cries of those defrauded has entered into the ears of the Lord. It is interesting to note that it is not just the Lord, but the Lord of sabaoth or the Lord of Hosts. This title was used in the Old Testament to speak of the power of God. It is often used in Isaiah to speak of God's armies of angels which he will use to perform his ends.

5 Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter.

The rich have lived in pleasures, but they are wanton. All they are doing is heaping together judgment as a cow is fattened up for slaughter. It may be interesting to compare this passage with Revelations 3:14-22 where Christ speaks to the church of Laodicea. Note these points:

1. The church at Laodicea says that they are rich and increased with goods, but God says they are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.
2. God encourages them to get their riches from him, that they may be truly rich.
3. Laodicea was noted for a medicine that they used to anoint eyes. God tells the church to get the real stuff so they can see clearly.
4. God's judgment is against this church. They think they have it all, but in reality they have nothing.

6 Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.

This is the epitome of unrighteousness and love of riches. There comes a point when those that are rich will even stoop to killing to increase their wealth. Some good examples of this in the scripture is Ahab killing Naboth for his vineyard and David killing Uriah for his wife.

Some closing thoughts on this passage:

1. God's judgment is against those who are rich at the expense of others.
2. We as Christians are not to put our trust in wealth. Our trust is in God, and God alone.
3. The gospel of prosperity is another lie of Satan. The lie that Christians are supposed to be happy, wealthy, and healthy is another trick of Satan to get our eyes off of the true wealth of God. This is nothing more than modern day Laodiceanism.
4. Do not get too uptight about those who seem to prosper in their wealth. Instead, be pitiful knowing that God is merely fattening them up for the slaughter.
5. Let us seek true riches, those that are eternal. Let us set our affections on things above.

Test 11 - Patient Endurance

The Second Coming of Christ is a recurrent theme in the New Testament. In fact, the prophecies in the Bible concerning the Second Coming are almost two times that of the First Coming.

In the New Testament we find 3 different words used to describe the Second Coming:

1. **parousia** - This word is used to describe the coming of Christ in a visible, personal, manner. The concept behind this word is not one of fear, but of expectation on the part of the redeemed when they will see Christ face to face. This is the most common word used. See Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 2 Thessalonians 2:1, and 1 Corinthians 15:23.
2. **epiphaneia** - This word is used to speak of Christ's ascension to the throne of his power. In the greek of that day it was used to speak of the taking of the throne by a new emperor. See Titus 2:13; 2 Timothy 4:1, and 2 Thessalonians 2:9.
3. **apokulyis** - This word speaks of unveiling, or laying bare. It speaks of Christ's coming as the laying bare of his power and authority. This word is more often used to speak of the judgment of the Second Coming.

In analyzing the New Testament's teaching regarding the Second Coming, two phases make themselves evident. That of the "rapture" and the "revelation". Since the context of the passage in James refers to the "revelation", that is where we will focus our attention.

General Truths Regarding the Second Coming

1. **It will be visible.**
2. **It will be unexpected and at a time no man knows.**
3. **It will be a time of judgment.**
4. **It will be preceded by a period of great judgment and tribulation on the whole earth.**

5. **It will be accompanied by the armies of heaven and a host of angels who will execute judgment on the ungodly.**
6. **It will be a time of salvation for the Jewish remnant.**
7. **It will be followed by the Millennial kingdom promised to Israel in which we will reign with Christ.**
8. **Christ will be revealed in all his glory.**

7 Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.

We need to be patient until the coming of the Lord when everything will be set right. The word for “patient” here is *makrothumeo*, not *hupomena*. The word *makrothumeo* is made up of *makros* which means long, and *thumeo* which means anger. A further note should be made regarding *thumeo* in that it refers to the explosive anger of great passion. Another word, *orga*, refers to the silent smouldering anger.

The concept James is trying to convey here is that we need to be long-angered until the wrongs of the world are made right. James also points out that the waiting of God is not to be seen as inaction on his part. We often think God is inactive in his judgment when he is in reality waiting so more men might be saved. We see this in 2 Peter 3:9 which says “*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering (makrothumeo) to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*”

We as believers look upon the Second Coming with mixed emotions. We look for the personal appearance of Christ and the redemption of our bodies, but we see the awful judgment awaiting the unbelievers who shall be burned with unquenchable fire.

8 Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

We are also to be long-angered. Just as God is patient we are to be patient also. The word used here is *makrothumeo*. What do we do while we are waiting? We establish our hearts. The word used here, *staritzo*, means to settle once and for all. Some comparison passages are:

Romans 1:11 For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established.

Luke 22:32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

2 Peter 1:12 Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.

James wants us to be settled on our beliefs and in our trust of the Lord. This is in contradistinction to James 1:6 in which James tells the wavering man to quit wavering. As we watch the world melt down around us, we can rest assured that God is in control and everything is proceeding as planned. Nothing will take God by surprise. He is fully in control, and one of the greatest testimonies we can give others is to show them a peaceful calm in the midst of trials, adversity, and uncertainty.

9 Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.

In this verse James warns against one of the possible reactions to the tarrying of God's coming, that of complaining and murmuring. The word grudge is *stenazete*. It is used to refer to that deep inward groaning we experience at times. Some other uses in the New Testament are:

Romans 8:23 And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our bodies.

2 Corinthians 5:2,4 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven. ... For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

The basic idea here is that we are not to complain and groan with each other. If we do so, we are in violation of God's directive. We need to realize that Christ suffered, yet he did not threaten but committed himself to God.

The phrase, "the judge standeth before the door" is used to refer to the imminency of Christ's Second Coming. It is used to denote this in Matthew 24:33 and Mark 13:29.

Test 12 - No Panic Approach to Life

10 Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.

Here James directs the attention of the readers to some examples of those who have patiently endured suffering and affliction, the prophets. As we look back over the pages of the Old Testament, we find the prophets were more often than not severely tested. Some examples, though not exhaustive, are:

Daniel - thrown to the lions

Jeremiah - thrown into a hole in the ground

Isaiah - sawn in two according to tradition

Zechariah - killed in the temple according to Christ

Elijah - persecuted by Jezebel

We need to realize that being a child of God is not a bed of roses. Sometimes we must pay for our faith with our lives.

11 Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.
James 5:11

As James choice example we see Job. The "patience of Job" was a term used often in the synagogues of the day. All knew of his patience. In all of Job's sufferings he did not impugn the righteousness or holiness of God. This is our example. Although we might suffer, we need to realize that the end is of much more glory that any suffering we feel now is not even worthy to be compared to it.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look, not at the things which are seen, but the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Romans 8:18 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.

Test 13 - Truthfulness

12 But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

We have in this passage James's reiteration of the command laid down by Christ on the Sermon on the Mount, that of oaths.

Matthew 5:33-37 Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths; But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

The idea behind Christ's condemnation of swearing is that the religious leaders of the day had taken the concept of oaths and swearing to a ridiculous degree. In fact, they added on all kinds of conditions to oaths, any one of which could invalidate that oath. A good example of this is found in Matthew 23 where Christ condemns them because an oath by the temple means nothing, but an oath by the gold on the dome of the temple is binding. An oath by the altar is nothing, but an oath by the sacrifice on the altar is binding. It is sort of like saying that anytime we make a promise and cross our fingers, that promise is invalidated.

Christ is returning the teaching of oaths back to the original standard of God, as he does in all of the Sermon on the Mount. He is emphatically saying that our word should be our bond. We should not have to stoop to making ignorant rules to bind ourselves.

James reemphasizes this point. He is saying that our word is all that is needed to bind us. I believe this is given for a couple of reasons:

1. We have no guarantee that we can fulfill some promises. We may die, or have a reversal of circumstances that would make it impossible for us to keep our promises.
2. Christ is coming back! We should not bank on a tomorrow to fulfill our promises.
3. Our righteous lifestyle, where our word is our bond, is a rebuke to the godless society we live in.
4. When we bank on tomorrow without consideration for God's plans, we presume on the future and become idle boasters. This concept ties in with James 4:13-17.

Test 14 - Prayerfulness

13 Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

14 Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

16 Confess your faults one for another, and pray one for another, that he may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

17 Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth but the space of three years and six months.

18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

19 Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him;

20 Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

This particular passage is somewhat difficult to outline since there are three themes interwoven together in it with the major theme being that of prayer. These three themes are 1) prayer, 2) healing, and 3) sin. Instead of attempting a verse by verse analysis of this passage, it may be easier to look at the three themes.

Prayer

Prayer is to the believer what breathing is to the body. We are commanded to pray in the New Testament since prayer is the method God has designed to unlock his power in our lives. Although many aspects of prayer exist in the New Testament, James emphasizes two in this passage, that of intercession, and fervency.

Intercession refers to that aspect of prayer where we take one another before God. In fact, this is the major use of prayer throughout the New Testament. We never find Paul praying for himself, he is always praying for others. Jesus time and time again prays for his disciples. In fact, he prays for us in John 17. It is interesting to see that there is hardly any reference in the New Testament at all to personal prayer.

I think there is a reason for this. When we pray for ourselves it is too easy for our prayer to degenerate into a self-centered conversation with God. When we pray for others, we are more apt to pray correctly.

A second emphasis James makes on prayer is that of fervency. God's power is unleashed in our lives when we pray in faith believing. Elijah is used as an example of fervent prayer. He prayed God would withhold rain in judgment against Ahab, and God withheld.

Healing

This is a very hot topic due to the many so-called healers of the day who make merchandise of men. The following points fall out of this passage.

1. James is the first book in the New Testament. Note that James does not say we are to go to those with the gift of healing. Nowhere in the New Testament is there ever a command for us to seek miraculous healing. Paul, who had the gift of healing, never sought healing for himself and many of his friends suffered from various diseases which he never healed.
2. The context of the passage refers specifically to disease that is the result of unconfessed sin in the life of the believer.

James is dealing specifically with the fifth cause, that of unconfessed sin in the life of a believer.

3. This is not a blanket guarantee of healing for any kind of sickness. Only that sickness as a result of unconfessed sin is in view here.
4. The pattern for healing is:
 - a. anointing with oil
 - b. call for the elders
 - c. have them pray over the sick
 - d. if they have committed sin they will be healed
5. Note the following interpretation of anointing with oil:

The phrase “anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” is better understood in light of the context as not that anointing where oil is poured onto the head, but that anointing of “rubbing” oil on the body. The term used for anointing, *chrío*, has the idea of rubbing oil into the skin in a medicinal way. Another word, *aliepha*, refers to the anointing of oil used in the ceremonial rituals of the Old Covenant. This then, refers to the use of medicine since oil was rubbed on diseased parts of the body as a medical treatment in those times. This passage would then teach that if we are sick, we are to do whatever medical steps need to be taken for a cure, then call for the elders in case the disease is the result of unconfessed sin.

6. God always heals in response to faith, not in hocus pocus or in response to the supposed “gift of healing.”
7. We are to confess our faults one to another, that is, we are to be continually in a lifestyle of confessed sin. This will act as a preventative against that disease caused by unconfessed sin. This should not be taken as a blanket clause indicating we are to air our dirty laundry. Instead, it teaches mutual accountability in the body of Christ.
8. As an aside, we see the Lord's table as a recurrent forum to confess our sins. Compare 1 Corinthians 11:27-34.

The Character of The New Testament Healing Gift

1. **Healing was immediate.**
2. **Healing was complete.**
3. **Healing was by a word or a touch.**
4. **Healing did not depend on the faith of the one being healed.**
5. **Healing included organic diseases and missing limbs.**
6. **Healing included the ability to raise the dead.**

Sources of Disease

1. **Result of the Adamic Curse - we all will die someday**
2. **Natural consequence of sin - lung cancer etc.**
3. **Judgment of God - Uzziah presuming on the office of priest**
4. **Unconfessed sin in our lives - David and here**
5. **Satan - woman who was crippled in the synagogue.**
6. **Glory of God should be revealed - man who was blind from birth in John 11.**

Sin

There are two concepts of sin in this passage. The first is that sin in the life of the believer that has not been confessed can lead to physical illness. We need to understand that although our sins are forgiven in the ultimate sense, we still need the day by day cleansing in the paternal sense.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The second concept is found in verses 19 and 20 which is that of evangelism. If someone converts a sinner in the assembly from the error of his ways, then he has saved a soul from death. Some take this to be physical death, but I think the better way to look at it is eternal death.