

## **A Faith for all circumstances**

**Jas. 5:19-20**

**“I am my brother’s keeper”**

**Intro: Today we complete our study the remarkable book of James. I hope you’ve enjoyed the journey. This practical little book tells us how to practice the pure and undefiled religion of Jesus. It shows us holding faith in Christ produces a distinctive lifestyle that affects how we respond to all life circumstances. Now in the final short paragraph James shows us that our faith in God also affects how we respond to those who fall away from the Lord.**

**I think I could say without successful contradiction that virtually every church building in America could be filled again if churches could only recover those who have become Christians and fallen away. There are so many who are overcome after becoming Christians. Very few of them are ever won back. James in this section discusses faith’s response to such people in two short verses.**

### **The characteristics of a backslider**

If any man among you... (note that this condition is possible for all believers) Strays... "planeo"--to wander from the right path. (It is the word from which we get our word “planet”).

“From the truth”. Here at the end of the book we see James addressing the processes he introduced in chapter one! It is the word of truth that begets us and of which we must be doers to be saved!

All of us who are committed to walking in the truth may take a step into darkness from time to time; but our walk is in keeping with the will of God. As gather from service to service we acknowledge the need for God’s forgiveness and pray to that end; moreover we may even be unaware of transgressions that may become apparent as we continue to study the word together. Living “under grace” gives us an assurance and hope that encourages us to keep growing in righteousness while we trust in God’s forgiveness.

However, the man James describes knows the truth and chooses to turn away from it. He has surrendered the very principle by which we may stand right before God even with an imperfect knowledge and life. He has deliberately left the truth he once knew. This is the person James has in mind; and such a person is in grave spiritual peril.

### **The consequences of backsliding**

This man’s soul is in danger of death. But what does James mean?

Those who hold the view that once one is saved, he cannot sin so as to be lost find this text very troubling. Their explanations seem to evade the clear important of the language.

**They contend that such a man was never saved and hence must be really “converted” to avoid spiritual death. Or,**

**they insist that the death here is physical and that if the man does not repent, God will take his life as a punishment for his sin, but he will not lose his soul.**

**Such bizarre explanations are the simple product of failing to recognize the obvious—that those who have been saved may indeed fall away from God and lose the hope they once had of eternal life. The Hebrew writer shows that believers can become unbelievers (Heb. 3:12); and that their fall may be irreversible and result in the curse of God coming upon them again. (Heb. 6)**

James may mean that the believer who leaves the path of truth has lost the life he had with God and has returned to the condition before becoming a Christian (Eph. 2:1); i.e. he is spiritually dead.

And James may also be thinking of the eternal consequences of this decision—that such a brother who turns from the Lord will experience the eternal death of all the wicked (Rom. 6:23). Heb. 10:26-27 suggests both!

Seeing then the serious consequences of such a life the faithful man wants to know what can I do to prevent this fate from occurring?

### **Faith's response to the backslider**

The other day Neal shared with us some details from a book he's reading on the civil war. It was interesting to see how the confederate army responded to those who left the ranks and went AWOL. They were sought them out and shot them by a firing squad on the banks of the river. Their dead bodies were washed away without even a proper burial.

Sometimes it appears that the church's response to erring more closely approximates this response than the Biblical one! Someone said, "we are the only army in the world that shoots its own wounded!" Instead, our goal should be to win back every person lost to the world!

Turn him back, convert him.

We bring a person back to Christ the same way, we won him to begin with—by trying to give him the evidence he needs to build his faith and enhance the strength of will to make a decision for the Lord! Hence we begin with sorrowful prayers to God for his return and for wisdom in approaching the sinner.

We come with meekness (not angry and threatening approach) seeking the causes and cures to the temptations that have led to the fall. Some times we are in part responsible because we have failed to be sensitive to the needs and temptations in another's life and failed to give the needed support and help. So we cannot afford to be self-righteous about it. And we realize that all of us are also vulnerable to temptation.

We come with evidence to instruct, to build faith, to motivate a decision that results in repentance. We come to study the Bible and

search for answers to the temptations that have the upper hand. We come to provide the motivation to make better choices.

We acknowledge that social fellowship is the by-product of our spiritual fellowship and thus, we refuse to maintain the same social association that would leave the impression that his sin is not so serious and that encourages him to continue in his sins (1 Cor. 5:11).

### **God's promise to the backslider**

You can live again!

You can be forgiven

Cover (veil) a multitude of sins

The image is derived from the idea that man's sin is no longer visible to God so that He refuses to bless us. It is covered: Cf. Ps. 32:1

However, none of these blessings are possible without genuine heartfelt repudiation of and repentance from the sinful way of life.

The prodigal offers a beautiful model: "I will get up and go to my father and say, "Father I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I am no longer worthy to be called you son, but make me as one of your hired servants".

Here we see the acknowledgment of wrong, the change of will, the humility that God expects.

**To those who are faithful: Our faith in the Lord makes us care about those who have fallen away! What are we doing to reach those who have lost their way?**

**To those who have fallen: You can be forgiven, if you will turn again to the Lord. Will you?**